

Wild 117

29 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

TASSIE ADVENTURE:
SOUTHWEST CAPE SOLO
FOOL'S GOLD:
PADDLING THE DARGO RIVER
FIVE KIMBERLEY DAY WALKS
TREKKING TRAINING
CROSSING THE ROOF
OF AUSTRALIA
CHRIS BAXTER REMEMBERED



Life & Death on Denali



AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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New Zealand was the last land mass to be discovered making it the youngest country on earth. It's for this reason New Zealand is known as the seabird capital of the world and is home to a number of birds found nowhere else.

Anyone wanting to experience New Zealand's most unique wildlife in its natural environment should visit Dunedin. The area surrounding the South Island city is the jewel of New Zealand eco tourism. Within minutes from Dunedin city you will find Otago Peninsula, home to reputedly the world's rarest penguin and the only mainland breeding colony of royal albatross. Around forty minutes from the city centre you will find the South Island's only mainland predator free conservation

sanctuary of its type. Orokoni Eco Sanctuary is working to bring back exiled native birdlife such as kaka, kea and kiwi using high tech predator proof fencing.

Yellow eyed penguins

With around only 4,000 yellow eyed penguins left in the world the Otago Peninsula is one of few places you can view these unique creatures in their natural habitat.

At Penguin Place you will walk through hides and tunnels to view resident penguins that come here for the shelter provided by conservation workers. They are shy creatures who prefer to breed in private and tend to have one partner for life. Penguin Place is also home to 'Penguin Hospital' where sick and injured yellow eyed penguins are rehabilitated back in to the wild.

Take a guided walk with Elm Wildlife Tours through private farm land and secluded beaches to see the penguins waddle back from a day fishing at sea. You will hear the penguins make loud shouting breeding calls.

It's for this reason the Maori word for them is hoiho translating to noise shouter.

Royal albatross

The Otago Peninsula is home to the only mainland breeding colony of royal albatross in the world. The Royal Albatross Centre run guided tours of the albatross colony where you will learn about the breeding process.

On board the Monarch Wildlife Cruise you'll see the unforgettable sight of albatross in flight. These birds have a wingspan of up to three metres and swooping speeds of more than 115kph. They are the largest seabirds in the world and can travel up to 190,000 kilometres in just one year.

South Island saddleback

The saddleback or tieke in Maori belongs to New Zealand's unique wattiebird family, an ancient group which includes the endangered kokako and the extinct huia. Once common in New Zealand, the birds faced extinction due to forest clearance and introduced predators such as ship rats



Photographs credited to Dave Corn, Stephen J. Jones, David B. Bunn

and stoats. The surviving population could only be seen on three outer islands until Orokonui Eco Sanctuary near Dunedin was established in 2007. A \$2 million, 8.7km pest proof fence was erected around 307 hectares of protected native forest. On a guided walk you will see bird and wildlife that has been reintroduced to the mainland. The birdlife is adapting well to their new surrounds and it has become common for native birds to find their own way to the sanctuary. In addition to saddleback you might also come across kaka, grey warbler, New Zealand kingfisher and tui.

Stewart Island shags

Stewart Island shags are only found in the southernmost parts of New Zealand and are very rarely seen inland or far out to sea. At Tairua Head below the albatross breeding colony you'll see one of the largest colonies of these birds.

Stewart Island shags are the largest of the New Zealand shag species typically weighing around 2.5kg. Because of their

weight and short wing span they have to fly at 70 kph to remain airborne.

Hooker sea lions

Hooker sea lions, also known as New Zealand sea lions and whakahoia in Maori, are the world's most threatened with fewer than 12,000 individuals remaining. Sealers began hunting sea lions in the 19th century when faced with depleting sources of fur seals.



The main breeding grounds are New Zealand's outer islands and the Otago Peninsula. Stay at the exclusive Kaimata Lodge and take an eco expedition during your stay. You will walk the sandy beaches that the sea lions are attracted to. Notice the males are much larger than fur seals and have a mane of thick hair about the neck and shoulders. They can weigh up to an impressive 400 kilograms. Females on the other hand weigh half that.

More information:

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Wild

AUSTRALIAN WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



Cover Hugh 'Epic' Ward
picking his way along the
West Ridge of Denali.
James Castrission

Sunset illuminates the
wild flowers on the
summit of Mt Twynam
Inger Vandyke

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"Wild and Rock are Chris' legacy to the outdoor community. Who knows how many people have been inspired to get outdoors by a ragged old copy of Wild, found in a waiting room or picked up at a friend's house? We could probably work out how many stories have been told throughout the years, but the tentacles of inspiration reaching outwards are harder to quantify."

Reflecting on a Legacy: Chris Baxter

I first met Chris Baxter when I was 14. We were coming down from a cliff in the Grampians at the end of the day and Chris was slumped on the side of the road, close to where our car was parked. He was grey-faced, exhausted and hunched over in pain. Despite suffering from a bad bout of sciatica he had been out scoping new routes to climb on cliffs nearby. Many years later, this time sick with cancer, Chris was still out in his beloved Grampians, and still climbing new routes. Right up until near the end of his life, Chris had the hunger to be outdoors and, more than that, to be exploring new ground.

While that day might have been the first time I met Chris, I had heard stories about him many times before. My old man (along with the legendary climber and bushman Reg Williams) actually took the teenage Chris, his brother and another friend on his first trip to Tasmania back in 1965, when they climbed Federation Peak. This was back in the days of A-frame tents (sans floors) and mountain mule packs (the frames of which could hold fuel that was accessed by a little spigot). Apparently the team was stuck in tents for a number of days during bad weather. My dad and Reg were in one tent and the impatient young tyros in another. During a lull in the storm, dad and Reg overheard Chris saying to his companions that they should ditch the older pair because they were slowing them down. At the time Reg and my dad were furious – as the older members they felt responsible for the younger guys – but I just think it shows that even back then, Chris' desire to get out there, to explore, was a powerful force.

A couple of weeks after first meeting Chris I got to climb with him. We put up a new route at a cliff called Barbican Rocks. It was one of well over a thousand routes that Chris pioneered. What many walkers may not know is that Chris was probably the most active new route activist in Australia. There is barely a cliff in the land where there isn't a route with Chris' name on it.

For many years I worked in a climbing gym in Melbourne that he visited regularly. Chris was one of those climbers whose passion had outlived most of his own generation, so he usually climbed with younger partners. This suited him, as he always liked to hear about what the 'new wave' (his terms for younger climbers) was doing. He loved juicy stories, gossip and news.

This passion for stories was evident in *Rock* and *Wild*, the magazines that he founded in 1978 and 1981 respectively. Both are the longest running outdoor adventure publications of their kind in Australia. When I first started at Wild Publications in 2007, Chris had been gone a number of years due to his illness, but the signs of his influence were everywhere. From editorial policy to the incredibly complete and detailed manuals on every aspect of the business, Chris' signature was all around, usually annotated with his initials 'CB' in the corner.

Wild and *Rock* are Chris' legacy to the outdoor community. Who knows how many people have been inspired to get outdoors by a ragged old copy of *Wild*, found in a waiting room or picked up at a friend's house? We could probably work out how many stories have been told throughout the years, but the tentacles of inspiration reaching outwards are harder to quantify. While *Wild* is unique among outdoor adventure magazines in the time and space it has given to environmental issues, I think it is the inspiration to get into the outdoors, to promote the beauty of the bush, that has had the most profound effect on people's support for the environment. It is this that will be Chris' lasting legacy to the bush.

I know that when I took over as editor, Chris had his doubts about whether I was suitable (just as in his editorials, Chris always spoke his mind). He was right to have his doubts – I had only worked in the industry for a year. But what saved me from disaster were the systems in place, the production schedules, the manuals, the documents – nearly all with 'CB' stamped in the corner – and

indeed the magazines themselves, guiding me through the often hectic cycle of a magazine's life.

At Chris' funeral, listening to the eulogies, I realised that I didn't know Chris that well – we were, after all, from different generations, with different ideas. But the passion he had for the outdoors is something that we both shared and hopefully all future editors of the magazines will share. Without a love for the bush an outdoor magazine is a hollow, meaningless vessel – it is hard to justify the trees for the paper it is printed on. But if it breathes a passion for the outdoors, if it is inspired and inspiring, then I believe it is worth something, because I still believe in that old cliché, as I think Chris did: in our love of wild places lies the preservation of them.

Our sincere condolences go out to Chris' wife Sue and all his family, from all the team here at Prime Creative Media.

Ross Taylor

CHANGES

Unless you have lost the power of sight you will have noticed a few changes in *Wild*: a complete redesign, two new departments and a changed approach to gear surveys. We have a new columnist, Dr Steve Van Dyck, who will be writing on natural history. Steve is the Senior Curator of Vertebrates at the Queensland Museum and, for many years, wrote a column for the now defunct *Nature Australia*. We have also started a portrait page at the back of *Wild*. Gear surveys have been improved as we have now decided to field-test gear and move away from tables to a more text-based format. If you have any comments or would like to suggest subjects for our portrait page, please email me on editorial@wild.com.au.

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Spinifex pigeon *Geophaps plumifera*



Australia is home to 25 species of pigeons and doves. (There is no biological difference between a pigeon and a dove. The word 'dove' tends to be used for smaller members of the family.) They're found throughout the continent and in all environments, from tropical rainforest to desert, but they must be within daily flying distance of water, so they avoid extensive tracts of sandy desert.

One of the most desert-adapted species is the little spinifex pigeon, a rather comical ball of feathers that runs rapidly on twinkling legs with its long crest plume bobbing. It is entirely terrestrial, in that it never perches. Rather, it spends the day in a small family group or covey, sheltering in the shade of rocks or spinifex hummocks, feeding quietly on seeds. Its plumage provides excellent camouflage and they're often detected only when they explode from close to one's feet in a noisy whirr of rapidly beating wings. Quail-like, they never fly far but, typically glide to cover then run a zigzag course amongst the rocks. When undisturbed, members of a covey mostly walk to the various resources within their home range, but stragglers may make short flights to the front of the group.

During breeding males can be quite aggressive towards each other. Disputes over females are reminiscent of jousting knights – they run at each other with heads outstretched and bodies held rigidly horizontal, looking for all the world like two wind-up toys moving on hidden wheels. They circle, bill-to-bill, then buffet each other with their wings until one retreats.

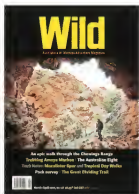
The European discovery of the spinifex pigeon occurred during a hydrographic survey of the northern Australian coastline by the *Beagle*, the ship famous for its earlier round-the-world survey voyage with Charles Darwin onboard. In 1839, the *Beagle*, commanded by Lieutenant John Lort Stokes, was exploring Joseph Bonaparte Gulf and had edged some 80 kilometres upstream along the Victoria River. The ship's boats were then launched for further upstream exploration. Surgeon and naturalist Benjamin Bynoe never missed an opportunity to get ashore and, on 5 November, close to the site of present day Timber Creek township, he shot a small pigeon resembling a quail 'in its flight and manner of running along the ground'. This specimen was skinned and delivered to London ornithologist John Gould who published a scientific description and applied the scientific name in part five of his magnificent treatise *The Birds of Australia*, published in 1842.

Within its wide distribution the spinifex pigeon occurs patchily and sightings are far from guaranteed. Perhaps the most reliable places to find this delightful bird are rocky gorges with waterholes in the MacDonnell Range, notably Glen Helen Gorge, and in the Hamersley Range. Birds in the Pilbara and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia are smaller and redder, with a red belly; those in the Kimberley, central Australia and northern Queensland are paler and have a whitish belly, as in the photograph above.

Peter Menkhurst

Photographer Andrew Davison writes: 'Walking the Larrapinta Trail in the West MacDonnell Ranges I came across a beautiful waterhole, which provided a welcome haven from the heat of the day. Six spinifex pigeons tentatively moved closer to the water with bobbing heads. We shared the water hole for five minutes until the birds were spooked by an accidentally dropped lens cap.'

To submit a photo for All Things Great and Small, write to editorial@wild.com.au. We will accept photos of plants or animals. Published photos will be accompanied by some history that we will source.



Issue 116, March-April 2010

CHRIS BAXTER

It was with great sadness that we learnt of Chris Baxter's death earlier this week. I write to express my personal condolences, and those of my colleagues at Bush Heritage Australia, to all members of the Wild Publications team. There would scarcely be a Bush Heritage staff member – or supporter – who has not at some point over the last 30 years been inspired and uplifted by the celebration of wilderness in Wild and Rock, nor been challenged and motivated to stand up for the environment through these magazines' eloquent advocacy for the natural world. In an era of some wins but many losses for nature conservation, the increasing commercialisation of the 'outdoor' industry, and continuing threat to the natural environment by uncontrolled tourism, Wild has remained steadfast: a fearless, independent voice for the preservation of our precious remaining wild places, a passionate advocate for inclusive and responsible nature-based tourism, and a model for ethical business practice.

As founder of Wild Publications, Chris walked the talk, always maintaining the highest standards of integrity. Through the stories and beauty of the photography in his magazines, his principled editorial policy, and the opportunities for all to participate in nature-based activities afforded by his many loyal advertisers, Chris' life work inspired a generation of bushwalkers, mountaineers, rockclimbers and other outdoor activists, whose love of the bush has provided the backbone for the modern conservation movement. He was always generous – with his time, his money, his experience and his love – to Bush Heritage, and many other conservation, human rights and development organisations.

We join you in mourning the loss of your founder and mentor, and in celebration of the hope that the values he stood for will continue to flourish through the great publications you now manage.

Vala a great man of the bush.

Doug Humann
Chief Executive Officer
Bush Heritage Australia

HUNTING: THE DEBATE RAGES ON

Ray Atkin's attempt to discredit my criticisms of the Shooter's Party's plan to allow recreational hunting in national parks (Wild 116) suggests that the plan should be supported because 'every little bit counts'.

Feral animal control is not about body counts and the odd fox and rabbit shot. It's about using the best science and tried methods to limit feral animal impacts. While recreational hunters run the Game Council their priorities will be on furthering their sport, not real feral animal control.

Safety in our national parks is too important to sacrifice to hunters taking pot shots at feral and native animals.

Andrew Cox
Dulwich Hill, NSW

I was sympathetic to Siegfried Szlagowski with his environmental ethic and obvious love of nature (Wild 115), but I was concerned with some aspects of what he wrote. This is an emotive issue, so I ask the interested reader to do some easy research on the internet and form their own opinion.

Please consider the following points:

- The Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill does seek to allow the hunting of all the native species Andrew Cox mentioned. (It's on the internet.)
- The Chairman of the NSW Game Council, Robert Borsak, is a former Vice Chair of the Shooter's Party. Check out his graphic descriptions of killing elephants for sport on the internet. Most other members of the council are also current or past members of the Shooter's Party.
- The Government has offered the party deals, including supervising hunters on culls, but they will not compromise.
- The Bill would put the Game Council in charge of regulating most of the laws of the act, including licencing and how many native animals can be killed and where.
- Mr Szlagowski claims that 570 000 feral animals have been taken from the bush, but doesn't mention who took them and how. Were any taken by hunters?
- The Sydney Morning Herald claims that in 2006–09, 9000 licences were issued by the Game Council and 6000 feral animals were shot. In the same period, one three-day cull by the Department of Environment and Climate Change killed 3000 feral pigs. Considering the Game Council received \$3.5 million in government funding in 2008 alone, claims of recreational hunters being cost effective are misleading.
- Recreational hunters already have access to state forests in NSW. I'm not sure about other states.
- The aim is the eradication of feral species; will a group committed to hunting

pursue that cause or instead manage feral populations for hunting purposes?

The problem of feral animals in Australia must be tackled with an integrated approach, and baiting (along with logging) is a disaster that has devastated native animals in NSW, but I am concerned that perhaps this bill would put Dracula in charge of the blood bank.

Scott Mackenzie
Wahroonga, NSW

ULURU

It is interesting to see how history gets rewritten in the light of people's changing attitudes. When I climbed Ayers Rock in 1972 there was no talk about the local Aboriginals not wanting anyone to climb what they call Uluru. This only developed later when more Australians went trekking and climbing in Nepal. About this time the term peak-bagger was coined.

Climbers and mountaineers have always been peak-baggers. When Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay reached the summit of Mt Everest there was no talk of disrespect for Chomolungma, 'Mother Goddess of the Earth'. If it were disrespectful, why would a Buddhist sherpa disregard this and strive so valiantly to reach the mountain's summit?

In 1957, a British team attempted the aesthetic Machapuchare (The Fish Tail Mountain). They failed to reach its summit by about 50 metres and rather than miss out on the first ascent they 'invented' the story that they deliberately stopped short of the summit because the mountain was sacred. It may well have been a sacred mountain, but that wasn't the issue. The myth about them stopping short because it was sacred was perpetuated in the literature and is now the official story on Wikipedia. This story was taken to the next level when an American expedition made the first ascent of another very sacred mountain, Gauri Shankar, by a very difficult face route and embellished their virtuosity by stopping a few metres short of the summit.

Shortly after trekking in Nepal became popular with Australians, talk about Aboriginals not wanting white fellas to climb Uluru began. What had changed in the meantime was a greater recognition of Aboriginal identity, their ability to articulate their wishes through the media and the granting of land rights to various tribes, resulting in a certain empowerment of Aboriginal Australians.

I believe the issue is more about Aboriginals asserting their identity, than the fact that they find it intrinsically offensive. My original understanding was that no one climbed Uluru because there was no point: why would you when there is no food up there? Climbing the rock was just not a part



of their culture. This is very different to my Western European tradition. The first I heard that just a few Aboriginals with special status actually climbed the rock, was in your recent editorial.

The net result of respecting Aboriginal wishes is that we are meant to feel guilty if we want to stand on top of this spectacular chunk of sandstone. Sorry, but I don't have any time for any religion, especially one that trades on guilt. There are a lot of things that I find offensive in modern Australian society. If a tourist wants to get some fresh air, exercise and a good view of the land, then I see that as the least of our evils.

Stephen Bunton
Mt Stuart

I've climbed 'the rock'. It was Ayers Rock back then and I'd do it again tomorrow. Interesting that 23 pages after your editorial, there was an article describing a trek on Amnye Machen in Tibet (Wild 116), described by the writer as home of 'Tibet's most powerful guardian spirit'. There was no mention of the wishes of the local indigenous people or what their response might be to busloads of western tourists descending on their holy mountain.

There are many sacred sites in the world – Machu Picchu, the pyramids, Everest – none that seem as closely guarded by indigenous people as Uluru. I find the idea that one race of people can have a 'connection' to the land that no one else can to be offensive and highly racist.

This is our land and that should be totally inclusive of all those who call Australia home, be they descendants of settlers from across the world or descendants from local indigenous people. I believe we have a better understanding of our world and the people who have lived in it by experiencing all that this country has to offer, including Uluru.

Stephen Hawkins
Mt Riverview, NSW

The story about Amnye Mochen won't actually 'on' the mountain but around it, following a pilgrimage route trodden for countless generations. Anyone is free to do the pilgrimage. **Editor**

I enjoyed reading the editorial on climbing Uluru and agreed with every word. I grappled with the same issues when we visited Uluru a while ago and reached the same conclusion, for the same reasons.

I struck a more difficult question recently, which I have not resolved. Mt Warning (Wollumbin) is an important site for indigenous people, and for non-indigenous people it is a significant geological formation and lookout point. Climbing it – especially just before dawn – is a wonderful and very popular experience. It is not a difficult climb, and the steeper parts are made easy by handrails.

At the foot of the mountains is a sign saying that indigenous elders request you do not climb Wollumbin. Most people (including me) ignore this. There are many differences from Uluru: the mountain is in the middle of a densely populated area, it isn't legally owned by indigenous people and leased back, nor does it feel arid and alien. But I assume there are strong cultural reasons behind the elders' objection and I do not feel comfortable flouting them. I would like to see if a compromise could be found between the indigenous elders and representatives of the non-indigenous community, creating a 21st century solution for the current generations of both communities. Do you think this is possible?

Peter Annand
Suburb, State

BAGGING' THE AUSTRALIAN EIGHT

Steve Waters' story on his long-term series of adventures 'bagging' the Australian Eight (Wild no 116) attracted my interest on several counts.

My late partner and I found ourselves having 'bagged' several of these peaks on our travels. We realised that perhaps we had a partly completed target that would motivate us to travel to and walk in far-flung areas of our continent. Unfortunately, Liz Burch was taken by cancer at only 52 years of age, just six months after our Mount Bimberi adventure.

Thirteen years later, I still have Zeil and Meharry to 'bag', to complete my task on Liz's behalf. Zeil's access problems kept us off it on two trips to the area. Any reader advice on how best to gain permission or find fellow walkers would be appreciated.

The issue of 'bagging' is easily critiqued, but as Waters says, it got his party together and to places they would never have otherwise seen.

The other issue of interest is safety. Garbage bags, running shoes, inadequate maps and navigation and a lackadaisical attitude to allowing sufficient time for a walk are recipes for disaster. Nature is often kind to us Australians, but can be cruel to those who show such a lack of respect for the dangers.

Please, Wild, help those of us who try to be careful to inform and mentor those others who need guidance in the simple needs of survival.

May the 'baggers' continue to be motivated into the bush, and may they be helped to plan their trips so that they are safe.

Bob James
Pimlico, Queensland

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to Wild, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, Vic 3205 or email editorial@wild.com.au

Corrections and Amplifications

Michael Giacometti writes that the second highest peak in the Northern Territory is not Mt Liebig as Steve Waters states in *The Australian Eight* (Wild no 116), it's Mt Edward (1423 metres). The height of Mt Liebig has been erroneously published as 1524 metres on several maps in the past, it is actually 1267 metres.

In the issue of the rucksack survey (on page 67 in the same issue) the wrong key was used. If you would like the correct key please email us at editorial@wild.com.au.



*Chris on the summit of the Fainters the day he met Michael Collie and Brian Walters.
Michael Collie*

OBITUARY

Christopher Raymond Baxter OAM

4 February 1946 – 28 February 2010

After a long struggle with cancer, Chris Baxter – founder of *Wild* and *Rock* magazines, pioneering rockclimber and champion of wild places – has died. He was 64.

The eldest of four boys, Chris had a passion for the bush and the mountains from childhood. The Baxters often stayed at the property that Chris' uncle still owns at Bindi near Omeo, and the family made many forays into the Victorian Alps.

Chris attended Geelong Grammar, and revelled in the experiences offered at Timbertop. While still a schoolboy, he was introduced to climbing by teacher John Béchervaise, a tireless adventurer and former editor of *Walkabout* magazine. On that expedition, Chris participated in the first ascent of Tower Hill in the Grampians.

The love of rockclimbing took hold, and Chris, with a variety of climbing partners, pioneered countless new routes throughout Australia and made many significant first Australian ascents in Europe.

In 1969, he and Chris Dewhurst achieved national prominence with their ascent of the imposing north wall of Victoria's Buffalo Gorge, on a climb that they named *Ozymandias*, invoking the lines from Shelley's poem: 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!'

Chris was a colourful raconteur who developed a reputation for his feisty defence of the things he held dear. After completing his university degree and a stint of teaching, he worked for several years alongside his father in his financial consultancy business, gaining an invaluable training in careful business management. It was during this time that he began to contemplate establishing a magazine to celebrate his love of wild places and rucksack sports.

In 1980, Chris was skiing on the Bogong High Plains when he met Michael Collie and me. As our friendship grew, Chris shared his dream with us, and after an enthusiastic period of intensive

planning, the first issue of *Wild* magazine was produced in 1981.

Chris gathered a small team of like-minded people around him and, over the next 25 years, built the magazine into a cornerstone of bushwalking culture in Australia. For much of its existence *Wild* has been the only full-colour, independently-owned outdoor adventure magazine in Australia. It was also the first commercial magazine in Australia printed on recycled paper, and has been a consistent voice for the protection of our wild places from the ravages of those who would spoil it for the sake of a dollar.

In 1989, Chris was honoured with the Australian Geographic 'Spirit of Adventure' Silver Medallion, 'in recognition of the inspiration you provide to the adventurous through *Wild* magazine'.

Chris approached life with methodical discipline. The first time I prepared to go on a lengthy bushwalk with Chris he produced scales to weigh everything we were packing, item by item. Every morsel of food or article of communal gear was distributed with exact equity. Anything not justifying its weight was discarded. I tended to be rather more haphazard about such things.

Chris loved the bush and was a strong walker. He hunted out places that were not well-trodden and often documented his adventures. With his feel for the land and skills as a storyteller, Chris was a wonderful walking companion.

He had an enviable command of language and an entertaining turn of phrase. If he disbelieved something, he might describe 'a flock of pigs flapping past the window'. Like Hergé's Captain Haddock, Chris delivered judgment with a loud 'preposterous!' or 'horrendous!' Dubious methods employed to scale a hard climb were 'jiggery-pokery' or 'chicanery'.

Chris conducted his business with integrity and meticulous attention to detail. He scrupulously insisted on advising the post office whenever they

undercharged the business. On one occasion an advertisement was submitted on condition that the magazine would also publish a press release. Outraged, Chris published the press release but binned the ad. The magazine was often offered, but never accepted, ads from sources regarded as ethically doubtful or in conflict with the ethos of the publication.

Chris' business success was recognised when *Wild* received the Victorian Government Small Business Award in 1993. In 2002 Chris was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for 'service to environmental journalism, through the promotion of wilderness activities and the protection of the environment'.

In 1983 Chris married Sue (née Tweed). They were a powerful partnership, and Sue was a stalwart support in the long period of Chris' ill health. Chris and Sue, not having children of their own, became foster parents of Marie and later Alyce. Chris wrote of the emotionally charged experience of caring for Marie in his book *A Child at Heart*.

Chris never lost his love of the bush, undertaking overnight walks and climbs until late in his illness.

He is survived by his wife Sue, by his three brothers, and by his foster children Marie and Alyce.

*'When dawn breaks across the rolling ranges
We will recall sharing silence with you.
When companions walk in high places,
And cliffs resound with the laughter of friends
We will catch your memory again.
When the river chuckles across its stony bed at last light
Or the plover calls across the silent water
Like a tolling bell echoing through the valley
We will think of you.'*

By Brian Walters

SCROGGIN

Going Deep in NZ

Stephen Buntin informs us that New Zealand cavers reached the one-kilometre-deep milestone when a cave (known only as EK3010) connected into the 775-metre deep Tomo Thyme. The cave is located in the Ellis Basin on Mt Arthur, near Nelson on the South Island. With its depth extended to 1026 metres, this cave has overtaken the 889-metre deep Blizzard Pot–Nettlebed Cave system, as New Zealand's deepest cave. EK3010 – Tomo Thyme is now the second deepest cave in the Southern Hemisphere, after Muruk Cave (1258 metres) in Papua New Guinea.

Himalayan Charity Dinner

The Australian Himalayan Foundation is holding a special Summit of Achievement Dinner to help raise funds for its environmental and healthcare projects in the remote mountain regions of the Himalaya. Star of the show and special guest speaker is Li Cunxin, author of the best-selling autobiography, *Mao's Last Dancer*. Andrew Lock (pictured on Kanchenjunga),



the first Australian to summit all 14 of the world's peaks over 8000-metres, will also appear, and will be interviewed by mountaineer and MC for the night, Peter Hillary. The evening will include a tribute to the late Alfred Gregory; photographer, explorer and fellow climber with Sir Edmund Hillary on the 1953 Everest summit expedition, who passed away in February, three days shy of his 97th birthday.

The dinner and charity auction will be held at Malvern Town Hall on Friday 14 May at 6.30 (until 11 pm). Tickets are \$100 per person, or \$2500 for premium tables of ten, hosted by eminent adventurers and special guests. The ticket price includes a three-course meal, all beverages and entertainment. All proceeds will go to support the work of the Australian Himalayan Foundation. For bookings, visit www.australianhimalayanfoundation.org.au.

Mountain running roundup

LOCAL RUNNER ALAN Hood has won the 30th Cradle Mountain Run, held recently in Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park. The 80-plus-kilometre course is very demanding, with steep hills, a duckboard surface for a considerable distance, stones, large tree roots and shoe-sucking mud. Hood nailed the victory comfortably in 8 hours, 43 minutes, 6 seconds. Second was Dave Heatley and Aubrey Henricks was third. Caroline Pivetta (pictured right) was the fastest female in 11 hours, 7 minutes, 17 seconds, with Sue Rundle second and Jane Shadbolt third. The Cradle Mountain Run will next take place on 5 February 2011. For details see www.cradlemtnrun.asn.au.



SYDNEY DOCTOR ALEX Matthews took advantage of the cool conditions during this year's Six Foot Track Marathon to take out the race in an outstanding time of 3 hours, 20 minutes, 58 seconds. The 45-kilometre race from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves in New South Wales has become such an iconic event that demand far exceeds the 850-person limit. David Criniti of Sydney was runner up and Andrew Lee of the Blue Mountains was third. A major upset in the women's ranks saw Colleen Middleton finish ahead of Angela Bateup, with a time of 4 hours, 3 minutes, 19 seconds, and Michelle McAdam was third. Fancy it? The next race will be held on 12 March 2011, see www.sixfoot.com for more.


RECORDS WERE SMASHED in Australia's toughest footrace, the Mind Alpine Challenge, in

March, with new fastest times being set in both the solo and the team race. Set in the Victorian Alps, the 100-mile (160-kilometre) Mind Alpine Challenge (MAC) ultra-marathon, formerly known as the Alpine Skyrun, incorporated 6000 metres of tear-jerking ascent – let's see you do that in your budgie smugglers Tony Abbott! There was also the 100-kilometre course for those looking for a softer option. Starting and finishing in Bogong Village, runners climbed peaks including Mt Bogong and Mt Feathertop. This year was the first time that compulsory breaks were not enforced, allowing a lot of records to be set. Phil Whitten was the first man to finish the 100 miles, setting a course record with his 27-hour sprint. Delyth Lloyd took out the women's 100 mile, with a new record of 34 hours, 47 minutes. In the 100

kilometres, Joe Murphy set the pace at 16 hours, 51 minutes, and Just Doiters won the team event, crossing the line in 21 hours, 22 minutes. The 100-mile relay team event was won by Team Outer Edge – comprised of Richard Bowles, Stuart Gibson, Jarad Kohlar and William Morgan – who crossed the line with Phil Whitten after 27 hours on the trails. For details on next year's event, check out www.mindaustralia.org.au.



THE 21ST AUSTRALIAN Three Peaks Race was one for the record books with Tasmanian sailor Phil Marshall becoming the race's most successful skipper, leading his team to its fifth straight victory at Easter. Captaining the evocatively named catamaran, Neil Buckley Motors Subaru, Marshall notched-up his fifth win. Marshall's team was closely followed by challenger Terry Travers, another northwest Tasmanian. On elapsed sailing time Travers was actually quicker than Marshall, meaning that the race was decided by runners, with Mark Guy and Tim Piper (of Neil Buckley Motors Subaru) putting in an outstanding effort on all three runs: the 65kilometre run up Mt Strzelecki, the 35kilometre Freycinet run and the final 33kilometre run up Mt Wellington. For the first time in the history of the race, the main short-handed racing division was this year split into monohull and multihull categories. While the veteran Marshall won the multihull category, the monohull winner was first-time entrant Rob Gourlay, a young Hobart skipper. See www.threepikes.org.au for more details.

Reports by John Harding and Will Morgan



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Kayak Africa Roadshow

CATCH ADVENTURER BEAU MILES as he presents a newly remastered film about his attempt to paddle around the Horn of Africa from the eastern intersection of the Tropic of Capricorn to its western antipode.

Presented by *Outer Edge* and *Wild* magazines, the events will be attended by Beau and will include a performance by Aussie band *The Animators*.

Melbourne: Thornbury Theatre Saturday 15 May, 7pm thethornburytheatre.com
Sydney: National Maritime Museum Friday 21 May, 7pm, anmm.gov.au
Brisbane: Powerhouse/Visy Theatre wed 26 May, 7pm brisbanepowerhouse.org
 (Tickets at the door: \$20-25)

Kimberley Kayaking Epic

IN FEBRUARY 2010, elite Australian wilderness paddlers Lachie Carracher and Anthony Yap led an international rafting and kayaking trip on Australia's largest river, the Fitzroy. The expedition worked closely with the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) to raise awareness of the environmental issues threatening the Kimberley Region – notably the major liquefied natural gas processing plant that is planned for the coast.

The team of 11 paddlers from Africa, North America and Australia travelled from Melbourne to the last road access point in the Kimberley, before chartering four light aircrafts to place them in the most upper reaches of the Fitzroy catchment. They then kayaked from Manning Creek into the Barnett River and on to the Hann – finally reaching the mighty Fitzroy after two weeks of paddling.

During the 23-day expedition that followed, the team survived dry lightning storms, ate lizards, explored ancient gorges swam with crocodiles, jumped off cliffs and experienced some truly world-class whitewater.

In February of 2011, Carracher plans to

return to the region to paddle solo down the Fitzroy. A solo descent is a progressive step in the world of whitewater expeditions – the number of solo whitewater class 5, multiday, remote expeditions can be counted on one hand worldwide.

"In this remote situation if something goes wrong then I will have no one to pick up the pieces," Lachie told *Wild*. "I understand the risks and I am 100 per cent confident of another successful Kimberley expedition."

"The Fitzroy is Australia's biggest river and, during peak floods, is one of the largest volume rivers on earth. It is truly the heart of the Kimberley. I will be once again working with my friends at the Australian Conservation Foundation to raise awareness to issues facing the Kimberley and the Fitzroy catchment."

Later this year there will be a photo exhibition and feature film encompassing four years of work in the region to raise funds for the ACF in an effort to preserve one of the world's last wild places. For more information, see www.kayakthekimberley.com or www.acfonline.org.au.



Wild/Outer Edge Adventure Awards 2009



THROUGHOUT 2009, WE kept a very interested eye on who was doing what in the world of exploration and adventure. The *Wild/Outer Edge* Australasian adventure awards are about celebrating wilderness-based expeditions, achievements and innovations, from the large scale through to the grassroots efforts that are the bedrock of true adventure. The awards also aim to pay tribute to the people and organisations that lend their support and professionalism to the outdoor industry. So without further ado, here are our inaugural winners:

Adventurer of the Year: Andrew Lock

In 2009 Andrew finally completed his 16-year project to become the first Australian (and only the 18th person ever) to climb all 14 of the world's 8000-metre-plus mountains, with his first Australian ascent of Tibet's Mt Shishapangma (8027 metres).
andrew-lock.com

Adventure Operator of the Year: World Expeditions

Launched in 1975, World Expeditions was the first commercial operator down Tasmania's Franklin River, an instrumental force keeping the Franklin free of damming, and the first operator to introduce Community Project Travel on a commercial basis, allowing travellers to combine adventure holidays with an environmentally focused or humanitarian project. worldexpeditions.com

Indigenous Adventure Operator of the Year: My Country Enterprises

Gary Pappin (Mutthi Mutthi), Junie Mitchell (Pooncarie Barkindji), and Mary Pappin (Mutthi Mutthi) run walking adventures through the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area in outback NSW. This vast wilderness includes Lake Mungo National Park and covers 240 000 hectares of a landscape crowned by lunettes large enough to be seen from space, and witness to human occupation for more than 40 000 years. Gary and his staff offer multiday access to areas not

open to the general public, and a wealth of cultural, archaeological and scientific knowledge. mycountryenterprises.com

Regional Adventure Award: Melrose/South Flinders Cycle Tourism Development Plan

For their development of the area around Melrose in South Australia into a worldclass MTB destination. otesports.com.au

Outdoor Not-for-profit Organisation of the Year: QORF/Outdoors Queensland

The Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation (QORF) and its subsidiary, Outdoors Queensland, has been a staunch and proactive proponent of recreation in the outdoor arena and is one of the leading consultative bodies working to improve recreational opportunities for all in Queensland and beyond. qorf.org.au

Hall of Fame: Jon Muir

Jon is well-known for his epic adventures, particularly his unsupported desert treks across Australia from south to north and to the geographical centre, as well as small achievements like walking to the North and South Poles and climbing Mt Everest.

Adventure Photograph of the Year:

Simon Carter

To watch a video describing how Simon snapped this incredible image, visit youtube.com/outeredgemag. onsight.com.au

Adventure Video Award:

Africa by Kayak / Beau Miles

For sheer perseverance in the face of adversity, as much as for the titanic effort he put in while attempting to round the cape of Africa in a sea kayak from Tropic to Tropic, we have awarded this to Beau Miles for producing *Africa by Kayak*. (Read Beau's story in *Wild* no 110.) Beau has produced a gripping adventure story, despite losing his camera and plenty of footage to the depths of the Indian Ocean. We were so impressed that we partnered with him to take

the film on tour around Australia. Check out the re-edited version, along with a live music show and a presentation by Beau ahead of each screening, as he stops off in Melbourne (15 May), Sydney (21 May) and Brisbane (26 May). For bookings and details contact Beau on 0419 163 002 or email beau@hotmail.com.

Outdoor Club Community Award: South West Mountain Bike Club, WA

For its tireless work in developing a proliferation of trails in Western Australia, and its involvement in turning the Cape to Cape MTB event into a huge success story. swmtbc.asn.au

Adventure Destination of the Year:

Yukon Territory, Canada

For sheer uninterrupted, raw wilderness and virtually unlimited adventure opportunities – from backcountry hiking to remote river kayaking – the Yukon Territory is hard to beat. Add a local Government that properly promotes the region and a population that throws all its enthusiasm into initiatives and events such as the Yukon River Quest (the world's longest annual paddling race), the 24 Hours of Light MTB Festival and the Yukon Arctic Ultra adventure race, and you have our winner.

Adventure Race/Series of the Year:

Rapid Ascent/Anaconda AR Series

For their continued commitment to excellence in the ever-expanding field of AR and wilderness-based sporting events.
rapidascent.com.au

Adventure Racer of the Year: Luke Haines

For victories in a whole host of tough events in 2009, including winning the Snowy Hydro Upper Murray Challenge and then backing up seven days later to win the Freycinet Lodge Challenge.

Team Adventure of the Year: Diane Chanut et al

Even the best expeditions rarely go to plan, but it's how you deal with the adversities and problems that lady luck tosses your way that defines you as an adventurer – just ask Ernest Shackleton. Early in the year, AROC's Diane Chanut and her crew planned to kite across the Bagley Ice Field in Alaska. Finding themselves utterly becalmed under the gaze of Mt St Elias, they changed their expedition objectives and spent almost two weeks pulling their 50kilogram sleds and backcountry skiing to the Canadian border instead (full story *Outer Edge* 16).

NOTE: The category Young Adventurer of the Year was not awarded due to insufficient nominations – got a late entry? Send it to editorial@wild.com.au.

Red gum backdown

JONATHAN LA NAUZE REPORTS: Last issue I wrote about how NSW Premier Christina Kenneally was reviewing Labor's promise to protect the great red gum forests of the Riverina. Former premier Nathan Rees announced an historic protection plan for 109 000 hectares of forest along the Murray, Murrumbidgee and other major rivers in the state's south as one of his final acts as premier. At its centerpiece, the giant Millewa Forest would become a 42 000 hectare national park, preserving critical habitat for 13 threatened species, including the superb parrot, koala and barking owl.

However, a compromised plan was announced in March by the Kenneally government. Nearly all of the proposed parks will be created, but with one ugly catch: 19 000 hectares of the high conservation value Millewa forest will be intensively logged first, for a five year 'transitional period'.

The Kenneally government is trying to spin the Millewa compromise as a win-win: great for the environment while minimising job losses. In reality it is neither. Logging will irreparably damage the very conservation values that make Millewa a global icon, including its ability to support viable populations of hollow-dwelling fauna extinct elsewhere. And logging it will have a negligible impact on jobs compared with the massive \$38 million restructure package and the fact that the industry retains access to the majority of the region's forests – 279 000

hectares of red gum remain open to logging under this 'protection' plan.

One of the plan's few visionary aspects is the handback of two forests to traditional owners under the Commonwealth Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) program. Wamba Wamba people have welcomed the proposed Werai IPA near Deniliquin, which will include conservation covenants and ongoing funding to manage the forest.

On the other hand, the Yorta Yorta's decades-long campaign for an Indigenous-owned Millewa National Park has been swatted aside for the sake of this compromise. Neville Atkinson, Yorta Yorta chairperson, says that his people 'will

be working hard to have this decision overturned'.

With green groups, traditional owners and the logging industry opposing the plan, Premier Kenneally faces a tough job getting it through a hostile Upper House. With pressure coming from all sides, it is not too late to change her mind. Over the coming months, environmental groups will be throwing everything they can at this last opportunity to save the red gums of the Murray and we hope you can join us.

ACT NOW

For action alerts, subscribe to the Friends of the Earth red gum bulletin by emailing barmah@foe.org.au or visit www.redgum.org.au.



A lagoon inside the proposed area for logging in the Millewa State Forest. Friends of the Earth collection

Feral horses explode in alpine areas

ANDREW COX REPORTS: Feral horse populations in the national parks of the Australian Alps are exploding, according to a survey report released in March this year. It revealed that feral horse numbers are now at 7700 and rapidly rising. This is despite control programs in both Victorian and NSW national parks. It is now clear that using current control methods, park authorities are unable to keep up with natural breeding rates. Population increase is about 20 per cent a year, which currently adds over 1500 horses to the population. At this rate, in five years there will be about 20 000 horses trampling the parks.

Kosciuszko National Park in NSW has about 60 per cent of the feral horse population and NPWS has been conducting a trapping program since 2003 that catches, at most, 300 horses, but usually much fewer. In Victoria efforts have been focused on a small but highly visible feral horse population on the Bogong High Plains, but even that is increasing. The larger population in the Cobberas/Davies Plain area near the NSW border is being tackled by the Victorian Brumbie Association, who round up (by horseback) about 50 horses each year.

It is clear that aerial shooting offers the only way to rapidly reduce horse numbers. The RSPCA have acknowledged that this can be done humanely if conducted by skilled operators. Horses are put under severe stress during trapping and transport, while the vast majority of horses removed from the park end up at the abattoir after being rounded up.

Failing to act will see alpine plants and wetlands trampled and more horses suffering as competition between horses grow and deaths increase during droughts and bushfires.

The Victorian and NSW Governments are fearful of using aerial shooting due to adverse publicity. Yet in Queensland, where horses numbered over 13 000 in and around Carnarvon National Park in 2006, aerial shooting has been carried out successfully – since 2007. The ACT Government policy is to shoot horses crossing into its parks from NSW.

The study conducted for the Australian Alps Liaison Committee is the third systematic aerial count of feral horses in the national parks and is conducted every five years. It shows that horse numbers have risen exponentially since the bushfires of 2003 and both the range and

density of feral horses has increased. It recommends expanding the survey to including neighbouring state forests that horses have also been moving into.



A family of wild brumbies graze on alpine plains in Victoria. Horse damage is visible in the background. Juliet Morris

ACT NOW

If you are concerned about the damage brumbies are doing to our wilderness areas, write to the Victorian and NSW Environment Ministers, Gavin Jennings (email: gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au) or Frank Sartor (office: sartor.ministers.nsw.gov.au) urging the use of aerial shooting of feral horses in our national parks.

VEAC threatened with extinction



VEAC has been crucial in the formation of many Victorian parks, including the Alpine National Park, the home of Mt Feathertop, pictured here with fresh pre-winter snow. Juliet Morris

PHIL INGAMIELLS REPORTS: Sometimes the things that work best don't attract much attention. The relatively unknown Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), the secret behind Victoria's park system, is one of those things. Since 1970, VEAC (initially called the Land Conservation Council and later the Environment Conservation Council) has quietly worked behind the scenes to establish one of the best ecological park systems in the country.

VEAC was set up by Victoria's conservative Bolte government to sort out a dispute over the future of Victoria's Little Desert, where a plan was afoot to turn infertile but ecologically valuable scrub land into farms. The new council was charged to provide expert and independent advice to the Government on the best use of public land in the state, considering issues 'as if for a thousand years' as the young Liberal Minister, Bill Borthwick, instructed them. Since then, VEAC has methodically looked at Victoria's public land use, region by region, chasing the best scientific advice and consistently involving the public in its submission process.

The Little Desert soon became a much-expanded national park and the Grampians,

Croajingolong, Errinundra, Great Otway, Murray Sunset and the Alpine national parks all followed. More recently, the fragmented box ironbark forest remnants of the central Victorian goldfields and the over-grazed and water-starved river red gum wetlands along the Murray have been given a protective hand, and a representative system of marine national parks emerged along Victoria's coastline.

The Victorian Government, in a bid to amalgamate land management agencies, has now flagged the end of VEAC. It believes the job can be done within the revamped agencies – but VEAC has always relied on its independence. Indeed, it was set up so public land-use disputes can be resolved by experts at arm's length from government. With climate change adding to the many other impacts on our natural areas – there's still plenty for VEAC to do.

ACT NOW

If you believe in the continued need for an independent expert voice to be heard when it comes to public land management, go to www.vnpa.org.au and sign an online petition to save VEAC.

More boutique bunks in national parks?

ANDREW COX REPORTS: The NSW Government is proceeding with controversial plans to provide new luxury accommodation in national parks. In April, NSW Environment Minister, Frank Sartor, will reveal legislation to amend the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act to make it easier to construct new accommodation in parks. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) also has plans for new tourism developments. In a draft strategy obtained by Colong Foundation for Wilderness under a Freedom of Information request, NPWS is considering new accommodation in Sydney Harbour, Minnamurra Falls and Washpool national parks, safari tents at Bundjalung and a 'sunset restaurant' at Govetts Leap in the Blue Mountains. This emphasis on tourism comes as

local NPWS budgets have been cut and under-resourced rangers are struggling. The NPWS budget has remained static for over three years.

The push for new tourism developments in national parks appears to be premised on the need for parks to generate more revenue. Ralph Buckley, professor of the International Centre for Ecotourism Research at Griffith University, argues that 'private tourism developments within public protected areas do not provide either funding or political support for the parks agencies, and bring significant social, economic and environmental risks and costs.'

ACT NOW

Contact the Colong Foundation for Wilderness (www.colongwilderness.org.au) to join the working group against national park development.

WOODCHIPS

Brown Mountain court case update

After 17 days in court, the final arguments made by lawyers for VicForests and Environment East Gippsland were heard by Justice Osborn in the Melbourne Supreme Court on 25 March. Justice Osborn has reserved his decision and the final finding could take anywhere between one and six months to be handed down. When a decision is finally made, it will have national implications for all native forests in Australia. To support Environment East Gippsland in this costly court case, visit www.eastgippsland.net.au to find out more or make a donation.

Coalmine Calamity

On 6 February, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and Clive Palmer, the chairperson of mining company Resourcehouse, announced the progression of a massive new coalmine in central Queensland. Palmer's company recently struck a US\$60 billion dollar deal to supply China with thermal coal for power stations. Tragically the 8000-hectare Bimblebox Nature Reserve near Alpha will be cleared to make way for an open cut mine. The Reserve is one of the few remaining areas of original forest in the area and is thus very important from a biodiversity perspective. According to Friends of the Earth, if the project goes ahead the exported coal would equate to about 20 per cent of Australia's total domestic emissions. Visit www.mackayconservationgroup.org.au and <http://bimblebox.org/>.

Following the Grain

From the solitude of his present, *Quentin Chester* reflects on the rocky contours of his past

The rock is about the size of a cricket ball, but feels twice as heavy. Held in the sunlight, it has pinhead-sized crystals that twinkle and gleam. The rest of the surface is flecked in soft shades of pink, orange and milky white, plus a spattering of black. Born deep underground in a molten mass, this little lump has been below decks for the last half a billion years – all, that is, except for the final brief tick of its life, the past few thousand years when it has sat in the light of the shore.

This is Windmill Bay on the eastern end of Kangaroo Island (KI). The beach is a curve of granite boulders facing the Southern Ocean. Sand doesn't get a much of chance to gather here, though at the head of the beach the gaps between the rocks are grouted with shell grit. Chunky headlands bookend the bay, catching the choppy waves that thump past when the south-easterlies blow, and on KI that seems to be most of the year.

The land around Windmill was cleared long ago for grazing. In its heyday it would have been rampant with corraes, prickly acacia, coastal daisies, sheoaks and narrow-leaved mallee. Now it's just stunted grass and tussocks, a wind-flogged basin where a pair of old male kangaroos are seeing out their days, munching and dozing.

In most respects the bay is the kind of place people are content to drive past on visits to the lighthouse at nearby Cape Willoughby, so the fact that Windmill has been up for sale for several years isn't surprising. Why would anyone want to try and own such a place?

By a trick of providence, my wife Dale and I now live a few hundred metres from the bay. If we step out the back door, go past the clothesline and follow the sheoaks along our boundary, we get to Willoughby Road. Then it's the same distance across another paddock down to the bay. This has become a favourite end-of-day walk.

While Dale looks for driftwood and inspects shells and bird skulls, I wander the boulders. Occasionally I step into the gaps and find a nugget of rock like the one I'm holding now. There are many possible rationales for being where we are on Kangaroo Island. But, speaking personally, one of the main reasons is the granite. As odd as it may sound, I've moved house and changed my life because of a private relationship with igneous material.

Granite is the king of earthly rocks. Not only does it underpin every continent, but no other planet has the stuff – it's all ours. Formed by magma that cools slowly, as much as 50 kilometres below the earth's surface, it's a concoction of quartz and feldspar crystals, along with other minerals, often including mica and hornblende. Distinctively hard and massive, when erosion and uplift do their thing and granite finally makes an appearance, it can form stupendous natural monuments: from the

towers of Patagonia and the Karakorum, to Mont Blanc's massif, Baffin Island and Yosemite's El Capitan. We might buff it smooth for kitchen counters and gravestones, but the way it stacks up in the wild leaves our designer statements for dead.

With eyes closed my fingertips read the bumpy surface of the stone, the smoothness of the quartz crystals and the grit of coarser grains. It's like a Braille version of my childhood. As soon as I could walk I was grasping chunks of this granite at Encounter Bay, 50 kilometres east of Windmill Bay. For a long time the dumpy boulders dotting the Encounter shallows were my world. The largest of them was a big split rock. I knew I'd arrived when I could scramble to its apex like my older siblings and leap into the spongy banks of washed-up sea grass.

This archipelago of dome-headed rocks was always there in the foreground of our striving. When the water was dark they were like turtles surfacing and you could read the movement of the tides by the number of 'backs' you could see. On summer days we'd swim to the outermost domes and perch, cormorant-like, on their knobbly, wave-polished summits until the heat of the stone got too much and we launched back into the cool water, diving to sandy depths of holes in the reef.

Walking to the eastern side of Windmill Bay there's an isthmus of gravel and tussocks. This bridge leads to a long, low hammerhead-shaped island of granite terraces split by fissures and seams. During storms the place is pounded by monster waves that send lathers of salty foam way inland. Even when you can walk out here in milder weather, it pays to be prepared for the occasional big boomer to punt the seaward side of the rock and lob sheets of spray over your head. There's nothing but a few ledges to climb, but I like the tactile buzz of hanging my body weight off a rounded flake or hauling up on a hand jam.

Encounter Bay ends in a pudding-shaped headland known as The Bluff. As a boy, it was a hill to walk up, a place with an old timber jetty to fish from. Later, when I started rockclimbing, I was introduced to a hidden shoreline of steep walls and large, slabby buttresses on the south side of The Bluff. It was like passing into another dimension where the frictional challenges of my childhood in the shallows were reinvented, although trying to get traction on brittle flakes and smooth quartz nubbins 30 metres off the deck was a more serious game.

Climbing changes forever how you feel about granite. It's the minimalist's rock of choice. Forget the rococo weathering of limestone or the myriad facets and seams you can toy with on sandstone. Granite is monumental. The lines are clean and unforgiving.

The frustration I felt on the sea-polished stone of The Bluff was nothing compared to the

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skin-shredding granite at Mt Buffalo in the Victorian Alps, where the crystals have teeth that bite. Put off by traditional limb-munching crack climbs, I escaped to the plateau where I could flit about in the sun on routes at the Cathedral, like Maharajah and Sultan.

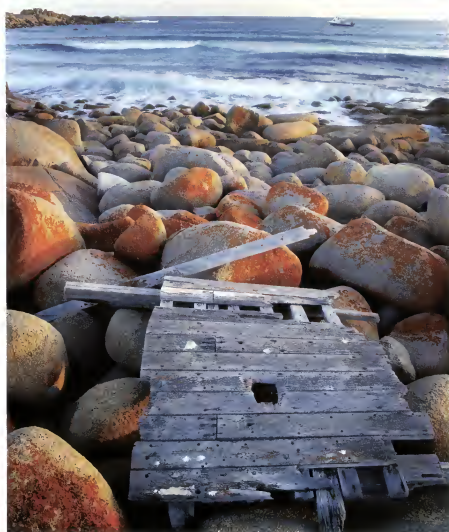
It was the same in Yosemite. The only good thing about being goaded into climbing Crack of Doom was finishing. Getting to the top of this wide slot was like stepping into daylight after a dungeon of horrors. By contrast, long open face climbs like Nutcracker were not just friendlier but also seemed a truer expression of the valley's epic scale and character.

Windmill Bay ends in a steep bluff of granite blocks. These Cape Willoughby cliffs are a mere trifle by Yosemite standards but the maze of vertical cracks and horizontal joints is scratched in the visual language that climbers think in. Every time Dale and I wander this way I do get twitchy – but only a little. For me climbing was always a way into the nature of a site as much as it was pure high jinks. Over the years other opportunities have come along to access the architecture of place and tune into the stories the cliffs can tell.

Watching the waves wash over the granite platforms at the foot of the cape I think of similar granite outcrops I've been lucky enough to walk and sail to: Deal Island in Bass Strait, Cape Le Grand and Mondrain Island off Esperance in WA, Great Glennie Island near Wilsons Prom, Schouten Island off Tassie. These are places where the wind and waves call the shots, where the cliffs aren't just implacable objects but homes for everything from seals and penguins, to sea eagles and tiger snakes. All my life I've been drawn to extremities, and now I live on one.

Some people said it was a brave move. It never feels that way. Reckless? Perhaps. Fiscally irresponsible? Almost certainly. But definitely not brave. Not when being here brings us so much closer to the things that matter most. We're not recluses – far from it. Nor is this a self-styled mission or redemptive quest. (Though from this distance it has to be said that city life does look increasingly strange.) All I know is, when the chance came to edit our lives, we took it.

There are things we don't have easy access to. Dining out isn't really an option, having a tyre repaired can take a day, and it's much harder to get a haircut, but we live in a spot that's irrepressibly natural. A place where echidnas, goannas, kangaroos and diamond firetail finches are hereabouts all the time. We enjoy some of the freshest air and cleanest water on earth and there's an ever-changing view out the kitchen window. Something's always happening on the breeze, or across the water, or down among the granite boulders on the shore. And if all else fails we duck out the back door and walk to Windmill Bay.



Some mornings I go alone down to the cliff top overlooking the bay and wait for the sun to rise. Sitting there among the tussocks I get the full blast of the ocean wind. It's good to be on the brink among the rocks. I love being connected to their solid simplicity. But on islands everything moves quickly. The sea and the clouds always seem to be in a hurry. This too seems like a gift, a healthy reminder that there's not a moment to lose.

Windmill Bay. Top, Cape Willoughby.

A Wild contributor since issue no 3, Quentin Chester is a freelance journalist and the author of six books about wilderness places. His preferred habitats include isolated corners of the outback and northern Australia, offshore islands and obscure gorges in the Flinders Ranges. His latest book is *Tales from the Bush* and his web blog is at: <http://quentinchester.blogspot.com>

Bob McMahon

Interview and image Ross Taylor

Passionate, creative, opinionated, rogue, historian, climber, walker, wine-lover, teacher, grandfather, activist, writer – are all words that could be used to describe Tasmanian Robert McMahon. Bob lives in the Tamar Valley where he works as an outdoor instructor, but he is also the spokesperson for TAP into a Better Tasmania, a community-based organisation that was formed in response to the proposal to build Gunns' controversial pulp mill. An avid reader and writer, Bob approaches life with the kind of zest that you can only admire. His latest project is a walk around the coast of Tasmania, a journey he is about 1200 kilometres into. He was recently in Melbourne for a bit of R & R (an ACDC concert and some reading in the parks), so we strong-armed him for a few words of wisdom.

I was dragged up in Tassie. I think I clambered ashore in 1950. My oldest brother is English, but the all rest of us – the other seven boys – were born in Tassie.

What formed me, as far as my love for the outdoors, was my first 15 years in Stanley in the far northwest of Tassie – that little peninsula sticking out into the Bass Strait. The big cliffs of the Nut were our playground, surrounded by the wind and the sea. Wilderness was in my blood from the very first.

Back then, no one had cars or telephones or television sets. I remember being taken for a drive along the north coast of Tasmania. I was probably 11, and that was my first sighting of mountains, the snow-covered Western Tiers. It had this electrifying effect on me. I had not been exposed to anything like that before in my life. I was hooked.

When we shifted out of Stanley to Devonport. We would hitchhike out to Cradle on a Friday night, just my mate and me (Michael McHugh), and we would climb some mountains and then hitchhike back again on Sunday. One night, when it was snowing like mad, we were shuffling along in our Yakka Can't Tear 'Ems and we got picked up by some hunters. They sat us up on the trailer on top of the dog cage – leaving us holding on in this raging blizzard as we were hurling along the gravel road. It was a good laugh.

I have poked around Iceland and I've been down around Tierra del Fuego, on a charter yacht through the Beagle Channel and up all the fjords and, you know this sounds a bit funny, but I think I know what wilderness is – I think I've looked it in the face. It was a moment in one of those isolated fjords, tucked in behind Mt Darwin. We'd moored the yacht – you run these lines ashore so that they wild weather doesn't take you – and at the end of the day this grey fox came down to the water's edge to look at us. I am thinking 'This fox has never seen a human before'. At that moment, as I looked at the fox, I thought, 'I know what wilderness is'.

The process of destruction is so rapid in Tasmania. And it's not just the obvious – the chopping down of forest – it's also the commercialisation of anything to do with wilderness. I work with Tasmanian Expeditions, so I am part of this business. There is wilderness still in Tasmania – not in the macro sense but more in the micro sense. We haven't got vast, great tracts of emptiness left in the world and we haven't got vast tracts left in Tasmania, but having said that there are still areas in Tasmania that have probably never seen the tread of human feet, even the original inhabitants. All the unknown cliffs we discovered, that was wilderness to me – the micro sense of wilderness.

"If we haven't got a connection with nature, then it's the end of civilisation as far as I am concerned."

It wasn't my love of the wilderness that got me involved with the Gunns battle, it was my sense of injustice. The group we formed is a big community group, not an environmental group. What we saw happening was political corruption, manifested in socio-economic injustice, which was giving a monopoly to one company, granting them all the resources, allowing them to liquidate the resources in this generation – probably within a decade – which is our forest resource. Plus everything that has gone along with that: the debauching of parliament, the destruction of due process, the lying and the thieving that has gone on – I just couldn't stand it. We just had to organise ourselves. It has been very powerful for the community Tassie is chock-a-block full of alternative democracies. There are groups of people doing this stuff everywhere because democracy has failed. A lot of Tasmanians are political atheists, there are some who will

always be rusted-on Greens, but I have become very much a political atheist. The power rests with the community as far as I am concerned.

What the government encouraged and then accepted from Gunns was a benefits-only study – the cost of the impacts or inputs were not assessed. When I put this point to the treasurer of Tasmania, I said that's why Gunns can't get the finance.

'How do you mean?' he replied.

'Why do you think ANZ wouldn't touch this project?' I replied.

'You'd know better than me', he said.

You can't possibly finance a business that's only looked at the benefits. The other three big Australian banks followed ANZ – they couldn't get far enough away from this Gunns' project, and a whole bunch of financial institutions around the world have followed suit.

The inspiration for the walk around the coastline of Tasmania occurred one night when we were bivouacked out in the open up on Mt Parsons, on the Hazards (Freycinet National Park). We were looking down across Flowstone Wall. It was a full moon, the sea looked like a piece of velvet and those wonderful whipped toffee slabs dropping – what would it be – 500 metres into the sea? I just loved that freedom and I thought 'I don't ever want this to stop'. I have done about 1200 kilometres, up the east coast from Freycinet, across the north coast, heading down the west coast to Temma. Then the pulp mill intervened and that has consumed five years of my life. But I am about to start again in a couple of weeks.

The next stretch from Temma to Strahan is not too difficult, it is still a semi-civilised part of the world – if you can call the west coast of Tasmania and its inhabitants civilised and get away with it. The problem with the west coast, north of Strahan, is that you are in serious danger of being run over on the beach by ATVs, four-wheel drives and dickheads on trail bikes. It's after Strahan, of course, down that

Bob on the latest leg of his around-Tasmania walk, from Temma to the Pieman River.

incredible coastline, that things get really quite challenging. Large sections of it have been walked, but I am sure some bits probably haven't – by white men. The stretch down from Macquarie Harbour to Port Davey is 30-days straight. The Tassie coast is amazingly empty.

I taught until 1987. We always had a climbing group every Wednesday afternoon, but after a couple of years I did two colleges and two afternoons climbing. When I left teaching in 1987 I did four years of tree surgery, starting my own business. Since 1991 though, I have been teaching rockclimbing. I love the people, they are great, so appreciative. School groups are great because you are getting kids that volunteered to do it, the tourists who do it through Tasmanian Expeditions are fantastic as well. Anything that gets people outdoors is great. It's about life. If we haven't got a connection with nature, then it's the end of civilisation as far as I am concerned.

There is nothing more tragic than when we forget our past – when collective amnesia sets in. In other words you can't learn if you can't remember. It's so important to be meticulous in recording things, especially in relation to climbing, the outdoors and exploration.

The other day I rediscovered an old walking diary. It's only 30 or 40 pages, but at one time I decided that I would walk every day and just take notes. I had forgotten I'd done it. I almost didn't recognise the person who had made these observations 15 years ago. We change. How do we know how we have changed?

Unless you can somehow refer back to former memories, how can you remember? So you have to give yourself these memory kicks: notes, photos all these things that really help you. I have written seven books, six are climbing guides [five of which are co-authored] and one, *Hollow Lands, Hilly Lands*, is a collection of adventures from around the world, including Australia. I love writing – I have a lot of unfinished writing business. **W**



UNFINISHED BUSINESS...



Weathered coastal granite on the Southwest Cape. Grant Dixon

Story Steve Waters

A lone ranger faces serpents and solitude during a solo mission on the Southwest Cape Circuit in Tasmania

I thought the snake had gone. This was supposed to be an easy day. Take a step back. Black scales, off the path to the left, half hidden in the button grass. Looks like its doubled back. Where is its head?

This is the fifth day I've spent alone on Tasmania's Southwest Cape Circuit. High on a ridge above the Southern Ocean, I'd been moving lazily along a good pad in perfect sunshine, reflecting on the sea and the nothingness between me and Patagonia.

The snake is a rude reminder that this isn't paradise. After the trials of the previous day, my guard had momentarily dropped. Big mistake. Concentrate. This walk is as much about mental strength as physical stamina.

THE FIRST FEW days had been idyllic. Easy walking along well-marked tracks leading to wild windswept beaches and good protected campsites with plentiful water.

The landscapes are stunning: New Harbour at sunset from the lagoon, or at sunrise from Smokestack Hill. Ketchem Bay from anywhere. Wilson Bight with its jagged rocks, wild surf and sheltered camp behind the dunes. Okay, so there had been that one ferocious gale that scoured the top of Amy Ridge and blotted out most of the views. But hey, this is Tassie.

A lot of solo walkers start with the idea of doing the full circuit, yet by the time they reach the end of the tracked section at Wilson Bight, nestling under Mt Karamu, their inner demons have been working overtime. They stay a few days, hoping for the weather to clag and gift them a good out.

I know because last year I was one of them. Why leave the comfy, relaxed south for the unknown, untracked west coast, where you

know – because you've read the track notes a hundred times – the last day is 11 Chapman-hours of untracked hell? (one Chapman-hour = 1.25 normal hours.)

'Hmmm,' you think. 'If I stay another day I won't have enough fuel to go around, so I might as well go back the way I came.'

So you meander back along the safe tracks and stay at every southern beach again, in the nice safe campsites, taking longer than if you had gone all the way around just so you can get to Melaleuca and tell the pilots you've been 'out for eight days'. And, let's face it, you have. And it's been wild and you've seen maybe three other people the whole time. But still an element of doubt gnaws and lingers. You could have pushed harder. You failed and let yourself down. And with solo walking, it's only ever yourself that you let down.

You know what you have to do before you even leave Melaleuca. You have to come back to finish what was started. The same way: alone. Better prepared this time, with provisions pared down and a stash left at the airstrip. Even a spare toilet roll and fresh undies.

So here I am.

IT LOOKED OKAY. There was some cloud, but the front had passed. I thought I'd chance it. The steep path leading west from Wilson Bight up the flanks of Mt Karamu was still familiar. This time, with my full kit, I took more rest stops.

The first untracked day was an eight Chapman-hour traverse of the Southwest Cape range. I met a group of oldies coming down. They'd come from Spain Bay and were caught on the range in the previous day's atrocious storm, and were forced to bivouac above the treeline.

After Karamu the path petered out. I stood and stared at the map and the landscape, searching for the elusive saddle that provides the easiest access on to the Southwest Cape Range. The cape itself stretches out to the southwest (funnily enough) – with a calcified finger thrust into the Southern Ocean, pointing to the end of the world.

Time passed and the good views began to wither as the clouds rolled in from the Forties.

EIGHT CHAPMAN-HOURS. By the time I reached the range above the saddle, the clouds had wiped the tops from sight, along with the escape route. I sighed, ate chocolate, filled my water bottle and waited for a clearing to get a bearing.

The rain failed to arrive, however, and sure enough, the cloud began to lighten. May as well go on, I thought. It's easier to find the summit than the saddle. Map and compass were my new best friends.

The range shifted in and out of the mist, and hours passed as I took compass bearings, consulted the map, scoffed scroggin and moved slowly from peak to peak. What should have been an easy traverse on a sunny day was rapidly turning into a Southwest epic, with visibility down to ten metres. Stumbling across a well-used pad at least eased my navigational anxiety.

Just as I mentally ticked off the less enjoyable aspects of solo walking – no one to confirm my choice of route, to share the mud, to laugh at my falls or split a chocolate bar with (not that I would split a chocolate bar) – the climb ended abruptly.

The mist revealed a small plateau, complete with a little cairn. What gives? I was expecting another crag. A hasty map check confirmed this was indeed the high point of the range.

I wandered tentatively to the north and suddenly the lights came on – I'd walked clean out of the cloud and the whole northern end of the range and the unknown west coast lay in front of me, naked, beautiful and bathed in perfect sunshine: Noyhener Beach, Hilliard Head, Flying Cloud Point, Stephens Bay.



From here it was simply a matter of joining the dots until I found the stake that marked the descent route to Window Pane Bay, which still took a few hours. The sun was rapidly dipping, but the stress of route finding had dissolved with the fog.

Once off the tops, the route became steep, twisty, overgrown and super slippery. Finally, after going backpack over backside numerous times, I emerged from a long scrub tunnel

above a sheer drop down to the dunes.

The sea was a welcome relief. It had been ten hours. I dropped my pack over the edge, only to watch it roll all the way down to the rocks. Forget the camera, I thought, but please let my fuel bottle not be punctured.

If the downside of solo walking is not having company through the tribulations, then the upside is that you answer to nobody but yourself and the weather. You can spend half a day sitting on a beach mesmerised by the power of the Southern Ocean or squeeze the last drop of amber from that perfect sunset all without the need for discussion. If you choose to finish the cheese, the cheese is finished.

Window Pane Bay is a sublime place. There is no nicer campsite on the circuit. Nestled into tea tree and melaleuca, on the edge of the lagoon with comfy beach furniture and heroic views back southwest to the cape. As fine place as any to lick one's wounds and apply mental salve.

After tumbling into the slumber of the dead, I was greeted by a morning fine and warm. A rest stop at Window Pane Bay was just what I needed but, alas, my demons drove me on.

I knew the good weather couldn't last. With the killer final day occupying most of my thoughts, and the previous day's bleak traverse

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still fresh in my memory, I didn't want to spend another day on the ridges trying to navigate in fog, so I climbed the easy track up above the dunes and headed north.

And that is where I met the snake. On a west coast ridge. On a warm sunny day. On a good pad. Alone.

TIGER OR COPPERHEAD? I decide to chance it. Me and my 25-kilogram pack. We run. The snake immediately rears and spits, but I'm long gone. Pale-yellow underbelly – definitely a tiger. I turn and we lock eyes, but the gap is enough. I force myself on for another five minutes before collapsing – my heart needing no more adrenaline. Dumb. Alone, no EPIRB, no search party for at least another week. Very dumb. Impatience can get you dead.

The easy open ridge with its well-defined pad had lulled me into a false sense of security. The snake snapped me back to reality. Concentrate. Don't take silly chances. You're alone and no one is coming.

I move on, in no hurry – today is a mere five Chapman-hour day. A few hours later, the day takes another hellish turn. The pad descends off the ridge and disappears completely in-thick beech forest near Faults Bay. Trees are down everywhere. Backtracking to my last known point I still can't discern the correct route. I take a bearing and plunge north, over a small steep ridge.

I can hear the surf below, off to my left. My demons escape. For five insane minutes I try

Watching the sunset over the islands I reflect on the difference between my two trips. The previous year had been relaxing and I'd never left my comfort zone. This one is pushing both my physical and mental limits. I am more anxious, very aware of being alone and vulnerable and a long way from help.

to plough through thick twisted tea tree and melaleuca directly to the breakers. I make about five metres and exfoliate both arms and most of my face. Extremely dumb.

Body shredded but sanity regained I back up and go in the opposite direction, following the ridgeline to the crest. Better. I find a very rough pad that breaks through into a clearing. Perhaps others had been bushwhacked here before? And there, ascending a ridge 300 metres away on the far side of the clearing, away from the coast, is the main pad.

Closer to Noyhener, the pad and I once again descend into thick coastal scrub, but this time it's more open and soon enough I'm on the rocks staring across at Muttonbird Island. The rock bash north along the coast is immensely pleasurable after the claustrophobic scrub, and it doesn't take long to locate the Noyhener campsite in behind the dunes.

ROUTINE IS EVERYTHING when walking alone, particularly when making camp. Put up the tent, inflate the mat, throw in the bag, hunt water, get a brew going. Simple tasks that enforce a sense of well-being and discipline, and keep the mind from wandering. If you don't do it, nobody else will. Off come gaiters and boots. Look for leeches, inspect toes. If there's time, explore. Otherwise cook dinner.

Get out the camera. Get out the book.

Watching the sunset over the islands I reflect on the difference between my two trips. The previous year had been relaxing and I'd never left my comfort zone. This one is pushing both my physical and mental limits. I am more anxious, very aware of being alone and vulnerable and a long way from help. Whatever I get myself into, I have to get myself out of. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as it's keeping me sharp. But it's also draining. Tension clings like humidity to this part of the trip. Tomorrow is 11 Chapman hours.

The sun hasn't cleared the Southwest Cape Range by the time I crest the dunes above Noyhener Beach. Day six: the day of pain. Or that's what I'm expecting. I have to tackle coastal scrub, open plains, two ranges, a long descent to Horseshoe Inlet, some swamp areas and a few hours of the bog-ridden Port Davey track to reach the huts at Melaleuca. I'm quite prepared to snap this into two days, camping out on the plains if need be.

I break the route down into objectives. First cross the coastal scrub to the small hill. By this stage I'm already paranoid about the scrub. Ranges, plains, rocky shores are fine, but thick Southwest scrub that sucks you in and disorients your brain so that you

Top, the author practicing his catwalk look at Smokestack Hill, overlooking New Harbour. **Left,** Steve at Window Pane Bay Camp. Both photos by the author



Above, a forest-backed lagoon at Ketchum Bay, Dixon

clamber around in circles for hours ten metres from where you want to be...this is the stuff of nightmares.

I reach the hill easily and plot a route to the base of the Southwest Cape Range, using low ridges wherever possible and avoiding scrub-filled gullies and creeks. On the last ridge I pick up a pad that gets me through the dense scrub surrounding the one creek I can't avoid crossing. Two hours.

The climb on to the range is steep but deeply satisfying, and the views west and north are superb. Once on top, the trick is working out exactly what spur I have ascended, and where I'm going I need to get off the Southwest Cape Range and up on to the Pascoe Range to the east.

Traversing around to where the correct descent spur should be, a good pad appears. (It's the simple things that give the most pleasure, like having your navigation confirmed.) The pad is excellent and it takes me all the way down and across Hennant Creek. Attaining the Pascoe Range I relax. The hard navigation is over, most of the scrub is behind me (I think...) and the weather couldn't be clearer.

The descent spur is obvious – I track directly northeast towards the inlet – but it goes on forever and I start to pay the price for only filling one water bottle at Hennant Creek. The day is scorching, and there appears to be no shade on the entire route. I'm reduced to five-minute stops every 30 minutes with just a couple of gulps of water. Hours pass and the tide is going out in my water bottle while the inlet barely inches closer.

While uncomfortable, I'm confident I can still reach the inlet, and I'm right – although I don't quite foresee the manner of my arrival.

As I approach its scrubby fringe, I literally fall into a creek. I drink like a fish.

The inlet shore is a pleasant change to the baking ridge, though the tidal grass quickly gives way to stinking ooze. Black swans monitor my progress as I come across what I assume to be Horseshoe Creek. The track notes state this creek as being too deep to wade.

I can't be bothered to strip, so I throw my pack in and dive after it, using it as a pregnant boogie board. I feel like I've leapt into a pot of warm tea. Pity my Scarpas aren't flippers.

Reinvigorated, I strip off and wring everything out before inspecting the damage. The waistbelt of my pack is broken and my pack is bleeding water, but I'd doubled-bagged everything hadn't I? Perhaps not. My unlaminated map is pretty soggy and, not long afterwards, my camera seizes up.

Walking on under a much heavier pack, I turn a corner and discover, to my annoyance, another creek to swim. The third creek I can wade and, at the corner of the inlet, I wring everything out one last time.

There looks to be 15 minutes of scrub between me and the Port Davey track. I find a likely lead heading east and get through the fringing scrub in five minutes flat. Stumbling across a nice white track, I rebuke myself. Idiot. How could I have missed so obvious a pad at the inlet? Then it dawns on me – this is no pad, but the Port Davey Track itself.

With the immediate relief of having made it back to the known world, I relax a little too much, thinking Melaleuca only two hours distant. Looking at the high feathery clouds above the ranges, I feel pleased I decided that to keep moving – another front is closing in. It will rain tomorrow.

THE PORT DAVEY Track is one long horrendous bog. I'd make better time without it. With my energy levels ebbing faster than my progress, and the soggy map becoming increasingly unreadable, I finish off the last of my scroggin. Two hours is looking ever more optimistic. Three and half seem more likely.

The sun sinks, one of my gaiters succumbs to the bog, and I'm starting to feel fatigue – the kind where you begin scouting the ground ahead for campsites – when suddenly a boat shatters the silence. I must be near Melaleuca Inlet. I push on.

The dusk has nearly turned into blackness by the time I hobble across the airstrip and the rain starts as I head for the huts – I've been out for 12.5 hours.

It's Friday and I'm expecting people to be around, someone to share a war story or two with, but Melaleuca is deserted. I haven't seen a soul since Mt Karamu. Opening my pack, I find my wet things vastly outnumber my dry things – fresh holes in my pack liner ensured most of my gear had turned to mush. I cook an enormous dinner and then sleep fitfully, not used to having a roof above my head or to hearing rain tap on it.

The morning view of peaks shrouded by heavy cloud further vindicates my decision to keep moving. I locate my stash and make a celebratory breakfast. Is that elation or relief I'm feeling? Either way, the job is done. Perhaps it's satisfaction. I put away my demons, put on dry undies and grin at my dry toilet paper. W

Steve Waters spent his formative years travelling and hawking dubious IT skills, before maturing into longer walks, climbing, writing and hawking dubious photos. Favourite wild places are Tasmania, New Zealand and the Karakorum.

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FOOL'S GOLD

Braving frigid water and swinging strainers, two paddling mates put in the hard yards to flow with the snow and find the route to rapid wealth on the Upper Dargo River in Victoria's High Country.

Story Rowen Privett

It's hard to imagine what passersby must of made of us. Dave and I were 1600 vertical metres up the side of Mt Hotham, hauling two whitewater kayaks through the snow with no water to be seen for miles. Talk about being up the creek with no paddle.

As cars drove past, curious faces pressed up against windows, we shared a laugh about the ridiculous nature of this trip. Like the gold miners of a bygone era we were hauling our heavy loads east from Mount Blowhard along Morning Star Ridge, through roughly seven kilometres of snow and thick bush, to the Upper Dargo River.

The seed for this adventure was planted years earlier. We both make a crust as outdoor education teachers in Victoria and in our spare time we like to dabble in whitewater trips. It's a silly habit of ours to finish one paddling trip with 'How about a trip on the (insert next river)'. And this was exactly how the idea for a trip on the Upper Dargo was born.

THE UPPER DARGO starts its journey on the southern side of Mt Hotham. Water from snowmelt flows from Hotham Heights and Mount Blowhard and then meanders its way south for 90 kilometres to the town of Dargo. This stretch of river is rarely – if ever – paddled, due to its poor access and remoteness, which is exactly why it appealed to us.

Throw in some rich history from the gold prospecting period the valley saw in the late 1800s, the promise of good gradient and alpine wilderness and...need we say more?

Lingering in the back of our minds though, was the worry that the river may barely be flowing or, worse still, might be choked by fallen logs and blackberries. Getting to the water was one thing, getting out could be another. Time would tell.

On a reconnaissance weekend we were knocking down a beer at the Dargo pub when we bumped into an old chap named Jim Shepherd. Turns out he was a bit of a pioneer of the Dargo Valley and even had a creek named after him, so we picked his brain for routes and conditions. His parting words were to watch out for the waterfall near Shepherds Creek. 'A real big boomer', he said with a wry smile.

Finally, after three years in the making, our moment of truth arrived. We rounded up our faithful logistics man Lawrie and his trusty old 1970s Series II Land Rover to help with the shuttle. With Lawrie filming our departure, we donned our snowshoes, assumed haulage position and pushed out along the Australian Alpine track before heading east along the Morning Star ridge.

The first 20 metres took both of us by surprise. It was extremely hard to drag and control our heavy 'sleds' as they hung off our waists at right angles down the hill. Rounding the initial corner the first of many hurdles presented itself in the shape of a steep and frozen slope. We had to cut steps into the slippery face of the icy incline to avoid the same fate as our skiing cousins only a few kilometres away at Hotham. The next hour was spent kayak mountaineering. Our technique may have been unusual, but it was methodical, and we were all too aware that a slip of a boat or person could spell the premature end of our little caper.

From there the spur opened up, daring us to follow, and we obliged in style, tobogganing along the gentle slope of the ridge, chuckling as we slid. The next four hours were spent dragging the boats along this same ridge. Crammed inside the rear of the boats was enough gear and food for six days. Fully laden the kayaks weighed about 45 kilograms, so hauling them through the wilderness and up slopes was no stroll in the bush. The last knoll along the ridge was a real back breaker. It was hard to believe that in the late-1800s, gold miners were filing out along this spur in large numbers.

After slogging hard for hours, the top of the last knoll at last appeared. From there it was 1.5 kilometres down a spur to the west branch of the Upper Dargo. According to rumour, the undergrowth wasn't supposed to be too thick here, but as any bushwalker knows, south faces are notorious for thick scrub.

At 4pm we decided to camp in a sheltered saddle. As the roaring fire kept the worst of the cold at bay, Hotham Heights teased us with bright lights that seemed a mere stone's throw away. After a bit of banter, we bunkered down in our one-person tent...the things you do to save space.



Dave hauling a fully laden boat Ro Privett.
Main image, Ro riding 'The Fang' rapid
Dave Matters.

The bush started out okay on day two, but soon got as thick as our morning porridge. Battling on under ripper blue skies, Dave suddenly lost hold of his boat during a steep section. 'Watch out below!' he hollered, as it slammed up against a tree next to me. 'Well parked Davo' I replied, as my mind conjured up images of broken bones.

We struck out towards a small creek to our west, in between the spurs, which seemed less thick and severe, with fewer logs to contend with. The slope abruptly turned into a steep downward climb. Having almost lost a boat a few moments earlier, we opted for belaying our kayaks down. Like backward multipitch climbing, one of us guided the heavily laden boats down the slope while the other kept the line tight on a friction knot around a tree. After repeating this process many times, it was a relief to finally reach the relative comfort of the creek. From there, we wrestled our boats up and over logs and through scattered blackberries.

The weight of the boats was mostly carried by the water in the little creek, but we were often forced to walk knee-deep in the water, slashing at blackberries with our expensive carbon Kevlar paddles. This continued until



Dave remarked upon a white glow from the bottom of the valley. After a pause to wipe the rain from our eyes, the realisation that the Upper Dargo was flowing slowly sank in. What we were gazing at was the upper west branch of the Dargo River, covered in white caps. Suddenly the blackberry scratches didn't seem to hurt as much.

Since we were both like drowned rats anyway, we ploughed straight through the deep holes of the creek, impatient to see what lay below. The river was clear of debris and flowing gloriously. Instantly three years of waiting, planning and hoping was paid off.

AFTER TREATING OUR boats as toboggans for two days, we couldn't wait to launch on this stretch of water. But before we did, we quickly poked our noses around the corner at the Eureka Flat battery site just upstream, where many a hardy soul tried to make their fortune. Back in the mid- to late-1800s, the Upper Dargo was abuzz with numerous gold mines and settlements, all tucked away in this remote valley, miles from anywhere. It's amazing how resilient and determined these folk must've been. Where we had lunch was the site of a restaurant called Tobias' back in 1867.

Sightseeing tour over, we braced in our kayaks and slipped into the river – afloat on the Dargo at last. Straight from the off it was a grade-two rollercoaster, with small chutes and various lines. It was hard to believe that the river was flowing so well only a handful of kilometres below its source. We'd timed it a treat.

The old Brocket settlement soon loomed on the bank, scattered with rock wall ruins from old miner's huts. For interest sake, we'd brought an old Brocket township map with us, which outlined the surveyed blocks for sale back in the day. Time was fast eating into our remaining daylight, though, so we concentrated on reaching the confluence of the east and west branches of the river, where a rare campsite was rumoured to be hiding among the thick vegetation.

Sure enough, the junction appeared through the bucketing rain after a couple more kilometers. Preparing for a very wet camp, we joked about the possibility of an overnight flood. It all felt eerily similar to a shared experience at the Loddon River campsite on the Franklin River in Tassie a few years earlier. On that occasion, as a joke, we had tied up our boat four metres above the river level in the fork of a tree, but it rained

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ONE PLANET



"We had to cut steps into the slippery face of the icy incline to avoid the same fate as our skiing cousins only a few kilometres away at Hotham. The next hour was spent kayak mountaineering."

furiously overnight and by the morning we found the water lapping at our raft.

It was one of those long nights tucked away in the tent, counting drenched sheep until sunrise and hoping the rain would give up by morning. We were well below the snowline but the icy cold seeped into the tent to keep us company. The night was made even longer because we couldn't find the lighter to get the stove going. Confused and shivering, we chose to conserve energy instead of hunting madly in the rain for lost equipment or the spare lighter, making do with a handful of snacks and a cold dinner.

There was no Franklin-style flood overnight, but there were promising signs of

good weather. The river had more gush after the rain too, and the second tributary also added to its flow, so we got on the water early.

The water kept us on our toes, flowing slickly and keeping up the grade-two pace the whole way, with little or no flat water. As much as Dave and I feel at home on the water, we never take it for granted. On a tight and tricky river such as this one, lined by thick vegetation, we had to be particularly careful of logs (known as 'strainers' to paddlers) and debris on the water. If we were washed up against a log it could be curtains.

The conditions required us to paddle very defensively, always looking out and never entering a rapid or river bend blind. We either got out of our boats and had a squiz, or 'eddie hopped' until we could see whether the river was clear downstream, before moving to the next pre-determined eddie.

With the weather clearing, we were all grins as another old mining settlement flashed past in the shape of Louisville. It's said that 1500 miners rushed to this valley after gold was found in 1863, with Louisville's population peaking at about 300 prospectors. Before long it became obvious that the valley

could not support such numbers, and the rush abated almost as abruptly as it began.

Our defensive paddling was paying dividends as we avoided some nasty strainers that reared their heads. No damage done and the grade-two rapids kept on rolling. We had to keep pinching ourselves at how lucky we were with the good flow and relatively clear lines. A shared smirk said it all: 'We may just knock this bugger off!'

Continuous rapids kept us honest and the occasional log gave us some air time. We came across one that was just underwater and made a 1.5 metre drop. Cheap thrills. By the next settlement, China Flat, we were starting to really hit our straps. The river was delivering beyond all our expectations; we both had our eye in and were now below the danger zone represented by the first steep section.

The rapids and banter kept flowing and we quickly found ourselves arriving at the grassy and rather palatial campground of Mayford. Hopes of adding a fresh pear to our lunch, courtesy of the famous 100-year-old pear tree here, were dashed by the season. Mayford, where the famous McMillans Walking Track crosses the river, was once surveyed to assess its potential to

Clockwise from above, Ro on the pull Dave Matters. The view downstream from the third night's icy campsite Ro Privett. Ro's face says it all – there must be easier ways to go a paddle... Dave Matters. 'Kayak mountaineering', Ro ferrying gear across an icy snow traverse near Mt Little Blowhard Dave Matters.

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become a township, but it never developed beyond one store.

A small distance downstream, a ten-metre-long mess of logs stood in our path. Clambering around the timber, we found some more clear water downstream, but more strainers and clawing blackberries made progress slow for the next few kilometres.

With less gradient and a more open river valley, we expected the rapids to ease, but the grade-two wave train rolled on until our muscles simply couldn't stroke any further and we pulled stumps.

BY MORNING OUR paddling gear resembled stiff cardboard more than Gore Tex, and we virtually had to wear our snowshoes to get around camp. The fire was cranked up to thaw ourselves and our gear out. Buoyed by the notion that we might reach Dargo by beer o'clock, we slid back into the water and re-established our acquaintance with this alpine water highway.

"With less gradient and a more open river valley, we expected the rapids to ease, but the grade-two wave train rolled on until our muscles simply couldn't stroke any further and we pulled stumps."

Miners Flat, passed by soon afterwards, placed us somewhere near Shepherds Creek, site of good old Jimbo's wicked waterfall. We were prepared for surprises and one duly bobbed up, in the shape of a mini gorge that narrowed and presented us with some solid grade threes and three and a halves, all with clean exciting lines. The crux rapid was a ripper double stager, with some nice chutes and lines, which we nicknamed 'The Fang' after a rock at its entrance.

With the hard yards behind us it was like nature had decided to throw us a beer and we were drunk on this river's glory. As the Little Dargo confluence went past and the river swung back to the south on the last leg to Dargo township, we pushed hard in the knowledge that happy hour at the pub wasn't far off.

A couple hours further on we past

Matheson Flat, putting the Upper Dargo Track on our river right. The day was dimming, but on we pressed. After negotiating a few more user-friendly strainers, it was just about dark, so we pulled up stumps just a few clicks short of Dargo township. Close enough.

While swinging high fives to celebrate the culmination of three years of planning and a successful journey, it dawned upon us that we had pulled up close to where some folks who were camping. Some swift explaining didn't dispel their opinion that we were 'nuts', so we adjourned to the Dargo pub for a debrief.

And then, who should waltz into the pub but good old Jimbo Shepherd. As we shared a few ales and tales, we had just one thing on our minds: We never found that waterfall Jimbo...? W

In between working as outdoor education instructors, Dave Matters and Ro Privett dabble in the white water world on a regular basis, particularly searching for and relishing rare wilderness paddles in our great outdoors. They are sponsored by Carbo Shotz sports nutrition.

Crossing the Roof of Australia

Bush bashing, boulder scrambling and battles with blood-sucking fiends – just another typical day during a traverse of the High Country in New South Wales.

Story Inger Vandyke

Uncredited photos by the author

A summer or two ago, La Nina decided to play games in the Australian High Country. Late snowfalls were punching holes through the weather patterns in Kosciuszko National Park, slapping snow and hailstones straight into the red face of summer, with rude disregard for our planned three-day walk across the highest peaks in Australia.

Grabbing the chance to leap though the meteorological window of opportunity that opened up between Christmas and New Year, Damian and I spontaneously decided to walk across the roof of Australia, traversing the flanks of some of Australia's tallest summits en route.

Driving to Charlottes Pass we glimpsed patches of white dotting the Snowy Mountains. Large snowdrifts were tenaciously standing their ground, still clinging on to the hillsides after a heavy winter.

But, just as we spilled out of the car, the skies cleared, the weather cooled and a squadron of flies descended upon us. Our packing list had been comprehensive. The only omission was fly nets to wear over our hats. Excellent.

Less perturbed by the grey clouds than by the flies, we donned our packs and headed down the valley towards the Snowy River, scrambling over a series of rock steps along the way – a precursor to the next few days we'd spend rock hopping granite boulders.

Beginning our ascent from the valley towards Mount Twynam (2196 metres), our planned camp for the night, we immediately hit a snowdrift and dropped our packs to investigate. Trickling waters generated by snow melt had carved a small moraine under the drift, providing sustenance to the first of the alpine flowers whose blooms scattered the surrounding fields with soft hues of pink, yellow and white. Small in size, the sheer number of flowers fed by this unexpected mountain spring provided a colourful contrast to the granite outcrops and fatigue-green shrubbery that characterises the High Country landscape.

On the bluff at the southern end of Blue Lake, our lunch stop and final major resting point before the steep walk to the summit of Twynam, we used our packs as sofas, reclining and basking in the glory of the sky reflected on the still waters of this ancient, glacial lake.

Leaving the lake for the summit of Mount Twynam, Damian and I split, with plans to rendezvous at a point closer to the peak. I followed the ridgeline while he decided to scale another, almost vertical snowdrift to the path at the top of the ridge.

Underestimating the angle of the snowdrift slope, Damian later regaled me with tales of having to take out his walking poles to gain purchase on the icy surface underfoot. It was this same drift that, eight months later, claimed the life of snowboarder Tom Carr-Boyd in the peak of the ski season.

Walking in the High Country is deceptive. What looks like flat fields of mountain heath, are actually low-growing shrubs covering boulders. Leaving the path to go overland isn't always a wise choice; the low growth underfoot can give way under your weight and it's very easy to twist an ankle. With this in mind, we stayed on the path to Twynam as the sun lowered in the late afternoon, reaching the summit and setting up camp an hour before sunset.

The sinking sun illuminated our alpine eyrie with shades of orange, pink and lilac as we cooked. Dinner was devoured and washed

Damian enjoying a barefoot moment on the summit of Mt Twynam at the end of the first day

down with vintage views, and our accommodation was a thousand-star hotel: a three-man tent with four-season sleeping bags.

During the night the wind whipped up, feeding our shared tendency for insomnia as it tapped out an anti-lullaby by flapping tent sides and jangling loose guy ropes. Eventually a midnight mission was required, a desperate dash out of the tent to secure the rigging before returning to the warmth of our sleeping bags. Despite the optimistic glow of the sunrise, the mercury had dropped overnight and fleeces were hastily pulled on after we crawled from the tent. There was nothing for it but to pack up quickly and start walking to stay warm.

The Sentinel and Watsons Crags loomed large from several vantage points as we strode towards the summit of Mount Carruthers. Near the summit of Carruthers, we decided to part ways once again. Damian wanted to summit Mount Townsend (2209 metres) from the little-traversed western approach. Sitting atop Carruthers, we plotted our respective routes on the map. His route seemed long, arduous and steep, but the weather was good, and there was little threat of it closing in. I continued around the much-loved and well-trodden path of the Main Range Circuit. We agreed to meet four hours later on the saddle at the foot of Muellers Peak. Later Damian described his adventure. He'd descended a rugged granite boulder slope to a creek

that was being fed by Lake Albina, another glacial puddle. He disappeared so far into the cleavage of the valley that he dropped below the tree line. At the creek, any skerrick of a path disappeared, so he followed the water, seeking an alternate route to the summit of nearby Alice Rawson Peak (2160 metres). From there, he figured, it would be an easier walk to the summit of Townsend.

Damian's assumption was correct for the latter half, but working his way to Alice Rawson, the exact nature of his undertaking began to reveal itself. Scrub grew to over head-height, boulders littered the slope and only his gaiters saved him from the spiked and gnarly undergrowth. With no visible

sight path to the summit and only a compass to map his direction, climbing out of Little Austria became a test of navigation and stamina. With great relief, Damian summited Alice Rawson, where the path towards Townsend over an undulating meadow was visible. Continuing along a lower saddle, he eventually walked the last major leg on to the rocky summit cairn of Townsend and then on to our agreed rendezvous point, arriving about 20 minutes later than

anticipated. My easier route had allowed me ample time to summit Mount Lee (2105 metres) and Mount Northcote (2131 metres) at relative leisure. On the way I was able to photograph the more scenic sides of Lake Albina and its surrounding peaks, and shoot some close-ups of the High Country flowers throwing their first blooms out in the breath of warmer weather. I reached our rendezvous point early, dropped my pack and photographed some of the tinier and more spectacular mountain blooms, with whimsical names like hoary sunray, silver daisy, billy buttons and pale everlasting. Just as I started to worry that Damian may have become lost and had begun to pack up my gear to go in search of him, he came around the base of Muellers Peak. We continued on to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko, exchanging tales of our respective routes, discussing the glory of the views from the summit of Townsend and the horror of thrashing through head-high heath to get there.

Close to the summit of Australia, we joined tourists who glared at us – perhaps in shock at our appearance after two days in the mountains without showers. They seemed surprised by all the stuff we were hauling around. In response, we glanced down at their feet. Some were armed with little more than a water bottle, light clothing and street shoes. We wondered how many knew about the sudden fluctuating weather patterns up here, and wondered what they'd do if confronted with a sudden white out.





Clockwise from above: Seaman's Hut. First night campsite on the summit of Mt Twynam. pale everlastings starting to bloom. Damian on a snow drift, Inger photographing the view from the summit of Mt Twynam.



"Underestimating the angle of the snowdrift slope, Damian later regaled me with tales of having to take out his walking poles to gain purchase on the icy surface underfoot. It was this same drift that, eight months later, claimed the life of snowboarder Tom Carr-Boyd."

Leaving the summit, we continued down along the Parks' development road to Seaman's Hut. A stone hut with an iron roof, Seaman's has provided shelter for numerous High Country walkers during bad weather. Provisioned with firewood and wooden slab benches, this tiny hut would feel like the High Country Hilton if the weather closed in and stranded us.

In 1999, four young snow boarders perished in a white out here, a very short distance from the hut. The weather closed in so thickly they simply couldn't find it. Memorials to the four snowboarders are

emblazoned in posters across the walls of the hut, a grim reminder of how tough life can be in this region during vicious weather. At Seaman's we toyed with the idea of a side-route scramble over the nearby Ramsheads Peaks, but this plan was quickly shelved once we'd taken our boots off and seen the start of blisters erupting on our ankles and the balls of our feet. Instead, we were sorely tempted to hijack passing mountain bikers for their steeds – a mischievous plan that would have enabled us to get to our planned campsite on the Snowy River far more quickly. Unfortunately, commonsense eventually

intervened, and we threw our boots back on and continued down to the river.

Close to the ford bridge over the Snowy, we diverted off the path and headed downstream to find a suitable place to camp. A sheltered spot behind some granite boulders offered an idyllic place to base ourselves, and there was plenty of daylight left to set up, have dinner and take a late siesta while listening to the trickle of fresh water nearby.

Damian dragged me from the midst of a power nap with a shout: 'Hey Inger, come and check this out!' I roused and headed down to the stream to see my friend plunging his hands underwater with a little waterproof camera. He'd chanced upon some tiny, rare mountain galaxias – minuscule fish that have escaped the predatory attention of introduced rainbow and brown trout by hiding upstream.

As they swam around our toes – seemingly happy with, or oblivious to, our presence – I could empathise utterly with these tiny,

guppy like fish. Just as they'd been chased up river by another, murderous species, we were being savagely attacked by a constant cloud of rapacious assailants: march flies.

These ubiquitous pests remained our constant companions throughout dinner – their ever-present hum akin to a form of tinnitus – and chased us to bed even before we could savour the last vestiges of the sun's rays retreating back through the valley. And they were there again, waiting impatiently to join us for breakfast too.

It seems incredible now that, with La Nina's impish interference with the seasons and all the obstacles that the mountains threw at us – leg-burning gradients, frigid nights and shivery mornings, deadly drifts and shrub-shrouded ankle-snapping rock traps – what finally sent us scrambling back to the car and right off the range, was the humble march fly.

This was my 12th adventure in the High Country. Much bitten, but still completely smitten, I'll be back for a lucky 13th...and next time the fly net will be the first thing in my pack. [W](#)



FEISTY FEMALES

March flies belong to the *Tobaniidae* family. Only the females of the species feed on the blood of humans and animals, while the males are quite happy to live on the nectar that is common in forests and woodlands where they live.

Female march flies use their two large blade-like mouthparts to pierce and slash the skin of their victims, and then feast on the blood that oozes out until they are engorged or disturbed. After mating, female march flies can travel several kilometres in search of fresh blood. These insects are the bane of bushwalkers' lives in the High Country, especially during the summer months, and particularly around water. Occasional visitors shouldn't feel too sorry for themselves though, it has been estimated that some animals can loose up to 300millilitres of blood a day due to these fiendish flies, a serious risk to their health. The next time you're bitten, comfort yourself with the knowledge that the little buggers only live three to four weeks.



The Australian Alpine region is the only place professional writer and wildlife photographer Inga Vandyke can get a mountain fix after years of high-altitude trekking in the Himalaya, Andes, Atlas Mountains and Indonesia.

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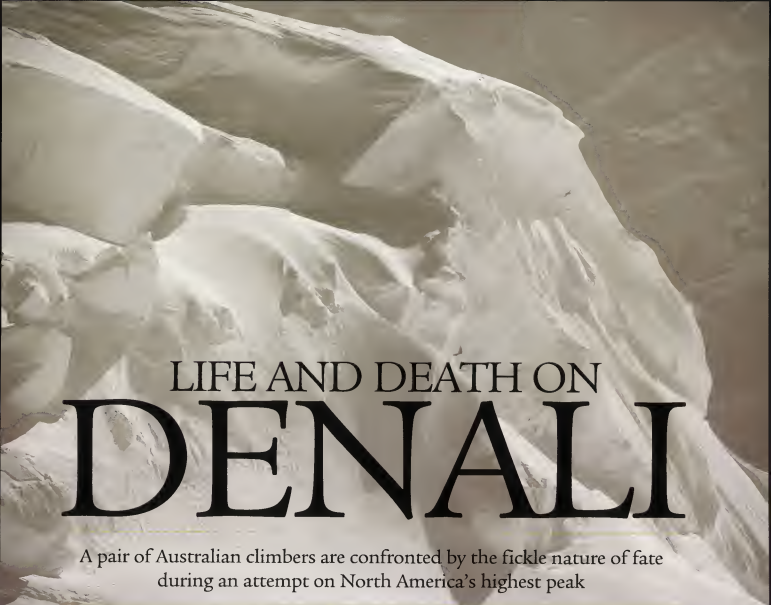
An iridescent Christmas beetle on a melaleuca in the Mt William National Park.

Clockwise from right,
Blue stars (*Chamaecilla*
Corymbosa), Kate Reed
 Reserve, Launceston.
Mountain rocket
 (*Bellendena Montana*),
 Cradle Mountain – Lake
 St Clair National Park. A
Chlenias caterpillar
 exploring a dog rose on
 Mt Pillinger, Cradle
 Mountain – Lake St Clair
 National Park. The
 common but very
 beautiful wax lip orchid
 (*Glossodia Major*),
 Humbug Point.



David Lode is based in Launceston, so he has ready access to the magnificent outdoor opportunities that Tasmania presents. His lifelong love of nature has led him to most of the state's wild areas to capture images of the natural world.





LIFE AND DEATH ON DENALI

A pair of Australian climbers are confronted by the fickle nature of fate during an attempt on North America's highest peak

Story and images James Castrission



Peering through the eyepiece of my camera, my climbing partner was sharply in focus. Beyond, three roped climbers were descending the knife-edge ridge beneath High Camp at about 5600 metres on Alaska's magnificent Denali. We'd started early and flown up the fixed lines on the brutally cold headwall and were now enjoying the sun, delicately picking our way along the hazardous ridge to High Camp, where we intended to cache food and fuel for our summit bid in two days' time.

It was a stunning, cloudless day. As I half pressed the shutter, two red auto-focus dots homed in on Epic's weathered nose. I could see a classic shot forming: the aperture and shutter speed were spot on, composition balanced and, by tweaking the polarising filter a touch, the sky turned a beautiful deep, dark blue.

However, before I had time to squeeze the shutter, the image disintegrated. In seemingly slow motion, the descending climbers faltered. The middle climber tripped on his crampons and tumbled like a flailing insect, unable to arrest the fall with his skittering ice axe. Moments later the second climber was jerked from his braced position. Now two climbers were tumbling out of control. My eyes shifted from the frantic top climber – desperately digging his axe into the snow – to the massive, life-threatening ice cliff two rope lengths below. I knew this was their last chance. If the top climber didn't hold the fall all three were dead. Through the camera eyepiece I watched a horror film unfold. A helpless feeling consumed me. There was nothing I could do.

SIX MONTHS PRIOR I'd been climbing in the Wolgan Valley in the Blue Mountains with one of my best buddies, Epic. Hugh Ward's nickname is apt given for his uncanny ability to always create adventure out of anything. Epic's been known to jump into puddles at the start of a two-day walk 'just to make the weekend more fun', 'forget'

his headtorch heading into a cave and plead with the person on the end of the rope to follow because 'the next pitch is much better'. To your average weekend warrior, Epic is... well... a sicko. But he's a master at suffering and one of the few people I trust 100 per cent. In other words, he's the perfect mountaineering companion.

Epic and I had done a bunch of big wall climbing all over the world, including a number of seasons mountaineering in New Zealand. Now we felt it was time to push beyond our comfort zone. Neither of us had ever been really cold or really high, so the challenge of heading to Alaska and testing ourselves on Denali seemed a worthy objective.

In the past, we've found regular cardio-training (like running, swimming and cycling) great for expeditions, but nothing beats a few weekends getting ugly. Let me



Two climbers approaching the windswept camp at 3700 metres. The snow blocks in the foreground are used to protect the tents from the wind. Three roped climbers slogging it up to 3700 metres.

explain. Mountaineering is about suffering. So what better way to train than to put yourself through a self-administered suffer-fest, depriving yourself of sleep and food and pushing yourself to the absolute limit?

On our last training session before heading to Alaska, we were moving quickly up a spur out of the Grose Valley. After about half an hour, I turned around to look for Epic. Oddly he was nowhere to be seen. Only moments earlier I could hear his heavy panting right on my heels and now nothing. I yelled a couple of times, but still no answer. As my anxiety rose a little I scanned

the ground, which fell away steeply. Finally, I saw him swaying up towards me, with his glasses fogged and face beetroot-red. Pissing sweat like a sprinkler he blurted through a painful smile: 'Had to stop and throw up. All good now though – what have you stopped for?'

After 14 hours, we bumbled back to the car with cramps and sore feet, happy with our fitness, our friendship and the knowledge that we couldn't be more ready for Denali.

stories (including Everest the previous year) and about the work they had done as doctors in Africa with kids suffering from tuberculosis. One was a spine surgeon, the other a brain surgeon. They showed us photos of their young families and we made plans to head to a remote corner of the Himalaya together in a few years time. By the end of the night, even though the weather remained terrible, our frustration was subdued somewhat and we felt

ascend. Progress for the first few days went smoothly. We farewelled the doctors and made solid progress up the mountain. After a week, we arrived at 4600 metres with 14 days' supplies left, feeling quite strong and confident about the task ahead. The summit was still a long way above and with most of the ascent being more technical than anything we had tackled so far, we felt pretty restless. After a couple of days acclimatising at 'advanced base camp' it was time to head up and cache a load at high camp...

"I watched in horror. The rope knotted and tangled around the two lower climbers as they tumbled, cartwheeling towards death."

THE FOLLOWING WEEK, squashed on top of each other in a battered shuttle bus, we were heading to Talkeetna, Alaska – the last stop before the Great White Mountain. With climbing gear cluttering the aisle, the bus driver bellowed through his Santa Claus beard: 'Here she comes'. Not knowing whether he was making another of his crude jokes, all was instantly revealed. There she was indeed: massive, daunting and intimidating. Standing well over 70 kilometres away, the 6194-metre Denali massif dominated the horizon. Before my brain had time to register what my eyes were seeing, my stomach churned and I felt insignificant. In the background, I heard the driver proudly telling another climber that 'The Great One' had a larger bulk than Mt Everest and due to its extreme northerly latitude in the Arctic circle, past climbers have found climbing Mt Everest good training for Denali.

'We've come to climb that...?' I spat. It was nothing like anything I'd ever seen before. Both El Capitan (Yosemite, California) and the Caroline Face of Mt Cook in the New Zealand Alps seemed trivial.

We arrived in Talkeetna with a steady rain falling on the bus roof. With the weather forecast looking miserable and preventing all access to the mountain, we found ourselves trapped in civilisation, not knowing whether we would get up on Denali's beautiful flanks. We spent the week going through our gear, doing a bit of crevasse practice over the balcony of our hotel and carbo loading.

One evening, while tucking into a massive caribou burger at the local roadhouse, two rather geeky looking climbers entered the diner, obviously frustrated by the crap weather. Oozing charisma and bubbling with laughter, it wasn't long until they introduced themselves. Over the next few hours, Epic and I listened to their mesmerising climbing



privileged to have crossed paths with these truly exceptional men.

After all the waiting, the weather momentarily cleared and the four of us found ourselves on the ice. Stepping from the small plane, I was instantly struck by the toughness of the weathered climbers waiting to depart. In a short time, the mountain had become part of them. Under their unshaven faces and chapped noses they looked rugged and robust. I felt like the dorky kid in new uniform arriving for my first school day.

Epic and I were anxious to start our

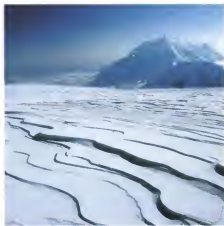
I WATCHED IN horror. The rope knotted and tangled around the two lower climbers as they tumbled, cartwheeling towards death. They'd gathered so much speed, so quickly, that each attempt to arrest their fall was futile. And then, in one final act of frantic desperation, the top climber drove his axe into the snow. It held. There was no movement.

Epic and I ditched our heavy loads and traversed to their precarious position. Fearing any movement could trigger a slab avalanche or see them tumble into the void below, we yelled at them not to move. We set up an anchor and Epic rapped down to the top climber who was drifting in and out of shock. The two below were in a much worse state. One of them had not only driven an ice axe through his hand, but his partner's crampons had also bitten savagely into his quad like a hungry shark. Thick, rich blood oozed from ragged and torn wounds. The third climber screamed in agony, having torn the ACL in his knee.

All thoughts of caching our load at high camp were forgotten. The only thing on our minds now was how to rescue these guys. First, we needed to move them down the ridge and then lower Dan (climber number three, with the torn ACL) down the headwall. With only Epic and me to hand, we knew we had our work cut out. We prayed for both the weather to hold and for other climbers to arrive and assist with the rescue.

After moving them to safer ground, Epic bandaged their lacerations and prepared hot tea while I ran ropes down to the fixed lines. We splinted Dan's knee with a snow picket and prepared to head along the ridge. Struggling with the thin air and the multitude of injuries, we slowly descended the ridge to the top of the headwall. Then just as we were about to start down the headwall, two Search and Rescue (SAR) climbers bumped into our battered and bruised party. 'You bloody baho-yooty!'

Together we spent the next five exhausting hours short-roping and lowering the party down the headwall until we stumbled into the



safety at the 4600-metre camp. We were completely bugged and, with everything happening so quickly, we'd hardly reflected on our efforts and what might have been. But sipping tea and nestled into our sleeping bags, the reality of what had just occurred hit home hard. The line between life and death in the mountains is fragile.

The next day was spent in our tent recovering. It was hard to refocus on our impending summit bid, but we knew we had to keep moving. Rising early the following day, we packed our kit and, with five days' of food, set out to establish high camp at 5600 metres. At that altitude, each inhalation only gives you about half the amount of oxygen as you'd gain at sea level, so breathing is strenuous, but we moved well and set up our camp in good time. By mid-afternoon tea was brewing and conversation had turned to the weather for the next couple of days. A climber approached.

'Hey guys, waz up?' He was Texan.

'Aw not much – just getting ready for our bid tomorrow – we're feeling pretty good', I replied.

After an awkward pause, he shook his head, focused on some snow on his boot and continued...

'Two blokes, wearing one-piece blue and yellow Goretex suits, fell 4000 feet to their death off the rib today', he said solemnly.

My heart missed a beat and I stopped breathing for an instant. 'You're fucking kidding...?' I said in disbelief. We knew it was our doctor mates.

Epic sat stunned, staring at his mug. I wanted to be anywhere on earth other than at High Camp on that bloody mountain. Confusion and anger swirled around my head. I love the mountains, but at that moment I hated them. Why them? Those two blokes represented everything that is

Left page, the horror fall as seen through the view finder. **Clockwise from top**, Epic, roped up, on the flanks of Denali.

Tam, Epic approaches Denali Pass moments before we made the decision to turn back. **Photo taken from the world's best dunny** at 5900 metres on Denali. **Epic tries to attach the injured top climber to the anchor.**

good in the world. The summit instantly meant nothing and the whole scene felt pathetic. I wanted off.

Grief, complicated by mild altitude sickness, welled in our hearts the next day. The summit was shrouded in clouds and high winds and our minds were restless. To summit or bail? We knew both Andrew and John would want us to summit. Decision made.

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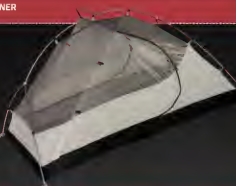
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CAPACITY: 3 PERSON PACKED WEIGHT: 2.69 KG MINIMUM WEIGHT: 2.41 KG FOOTPRINT WEIGHT: 300 GMS FLOOR AREA: 3.49 M²

*MINIMUM WEIGHT INCLUDES INNER, FLY, POLES AND 2 X PEGS ONLY.

I wanted to be anywhere on earth other than at High Camp on that bloody mountain. Confusion and anger swirled around my head. I love the mountains, but at that moment I hated them.

Looking down at Mount Foraker from High Camp.



In the fading light of dusk, the clouds cleared and the precious weather window arrived. We packed our kit and nervously set off for the summit, knowing that this was our ticket to get off the mountain.

Roped together and dressed in down gear to combat the -30° conditions, we edged closer to the elusive summit of Denali. My brain was having trouble processing the rescue and what had happened to Andrew and John. I thought about the last time we'd seen them and the loose plans we'd made to head to the Himalaya together in a few years time. Did their families know yet?

Heaving for air, we topped out over Denali Pass, less than 600 metres from the summit, and were blasted by plumes of swirling

snow. The summit ridge was lost in cloud and for the first time on the mountain the altitude began to hit me hard. I became hyper-emotional with the smallest things really upsetting me. In one episode I couldn't adjust my fogged goggles through the big down mitts and found myself crying like a baby. I realised that I'd lost all feeling in my toes and my anxiety grew. Every five steps I found myself heaving for air as I lost vision. Things had become serious; the altitude was getting the better of me.

As we descended Denali, I swayed and lurched drunkenly from side to side. Soon, I was choking back vomit before it exploded without warning into the snow. Our summit bid was over. It was time to leave.

I ARRIVED BACK in Australia an emotional wreck. It took me a couple of days to work up the courage to download the images from my SLR on to my laptop. I had no idea what to expect or how I would react.

I examined each photo. The aperture, exposure and composition of each photo now had new meaning. The photos stirred my emotions, forcing me to ask questions without answers. Why were these guys alive and our doctor friends dead? How do you explain the beauty and exhilaration to those who have never climbed mountains?

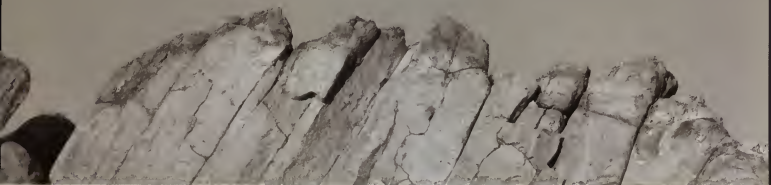
And why do I want to return when life is so good back home? W

James Cossissim is a 27-year-old adventurer best known for his epic sea kayak voyage across the Tasman Sea from Australia to New Zealand. To find out more about him and his adventures visit www.crossingtheditch.com.au.

Trekking training

There's a smarter way to get your body in shape for a multiday epic than simply pounding the pathways

By Alex Shirley



IN A FAST-PACED, yet often sedentary world, bushwalking can be a cathartic and massively satisfying activity. It has profound psychological benefits: worries are quickly forgotten or put in perspective when you're walking through verdant rainforest, breathing moist cool air.

Physically, walking is one of the most natural movement patterns known to man and it can be used as a powerful tool to strengthen the body. The integrated use of the arms, legs and torso boosts metabolism and leads to improved circulation, respiration and detoxification. Walking over uneven terrain will challenge your body, and therefore help to develop your sense of balance and control.

Each year thousands of Australians stride off to explore renowned trekking destinations such as Kokoda, Tasmania, Kilimanjaro, Everest Base Camp or Machu Picchu. Despite the psychological and physical benefits of walking, however, suddenly embarking on a demanding trek when you spend a large proportion of your normal time in an office environment can quickly turn into a terrible ordeal unless you undertake adequate physical training.

But how do you train yourself to put one foot in front of the other, besides going for a series of long walks?

A mistake made by many walkers is to focus solely on cardiovascular training before embarking on a multistage walk. Climbing up a steep, slippery and uneven

track with mud clinging to your boots requires a great deal of leg strength, while nothing gets the thighs burning quite like a descent back down a sharp slope wearing a heavy pack. The most effective way to prepare yourself for these situations is to support your aerobic training by building a strong base of stability and strength through appropriate resistance training. This not only increases your ability to trek more efficiently, but also reduces your chances of injury. You will also receive the added benefit of improving your body shape by building lean muscle that boosts your metabolism.

It is important to note that your pre-expedition program should not only develop strength but also that the strength developed should be functional – that is, it should carry over to help you meet or exceed the specific demands of your walking environment. Lying down on a fixed piece of gym equipment that allows you to isolate your leg muscles might help you to build stronger legs but it will not improve your ability to move in an unstable, natural environment where you have to negotiate rocks, trees, streams, roots and mud. Finding the most economical and safest way through this obstacle course requires a number of more technical movements. The more versatile movement skills you have, the better you will be able to travel across this terrain.

The following walking-specific strength exercises have been designed to fully

prepare you for the challenges of a trek and should be combined with your cardio training for optimal performance. They are suitable for someone who has a good foundation of cardiovascular and functional movement training. If you do not have this foundation then a more basic strength and stability program would be more suitable – attempting the exercises without a base level of training could lead to injury.

THE BASICS

- Start your strength training at least 12 weeks before your trek.
- Choose three or four exercises from the selection below that are at an appropriate level for you – you should be able to perform the exercises with perfect form.
- Carry out the exercises two to three times per week.
- Warm up properly and stretch your tight muscles before your sessions.
- Perform the exercises in a circuit format starting with the most challenging exercises.
- Perform the circuit two to five times with a rest of one to three minutes in between each circuit.
- Progress by adding one set every week.
- Change your program by adding more challenging exercises every four to six weeks.



1

1. SLOW WALKING (EASY)

- Stand tall with good posture.
- Start walking as slowly as possible – the key is to always be moving but as slowly as you can.
- The slower you go the more you will

develop your balance and ankle stability.

- To increase the challenge, close your eyes as you perform this exercise.
- Perform for two to three minutes.



2

2. ONE LEG BALANCE (EASY)

- Stand tall with good posture.
- Slowly lift one leg off the floor and hold onto the knee.
- Maintaining good posture, with your shoulders back and relaxed, try to balance for as long as possible.
- Build up to one minute.
- When you can comfortably balance for one minute then progress this exercise by closing your eyes (making sure that you are in a clear area to avoid injury if you fall).

3. WALKING LUNGE (MODERATE)

- Begin with a static lunge.
- Draw your pelvic floor and belly button inward just prior to stepping forward.
- Instead of pushing off with your front foot and returning to the start position, push off with your back foot and step into a second lunge with the other leg.
- Continue in a straight line.
- Perform 12–20 repetitions in total, with perfect form.

3



4

4. SQUAT WITH POLE (EASY)

- Stand with your feet wide enough for you to squat down between your legs, holding onto a support. Position your head up over your shoulders and your shoulders in line with your hips.
- Draw your pelvic floor and belly button in. Descend slowly by bending at the knees and hips.
- During the descent, maintain weight distribution between the mid-foot and heels. Do not allow the feet to cave inwards or shift outwards.
- While continuing to draw pelvic floor and belly button in and maintaining optimal

alignment, 'drive' through the feet extending the ankle, knee and hip joints while your weight is evenly distributed between heels and mid-foot. Do not allow body weight to shift toward the toes. The knees should track over the second and third toes.

- Perform downward reps slowly. Focus on the descent and the squat position.
- Perform 12–20 reps with perfect form.

5. STEP DOWNS (MODERATE/HARD)

- Stand on a bench or step with good posture.
- Draw your pelvic floor and belly button

inward and hold one leg off the ground as you drop into a squat position, keeping your torso as upright as possible. The middle of the knee of your supporting leg should stay in alignment with your second toe during the exercise.

- Perform eight to 12 repetitions.
- Progress the exercise by wearing a backpack.
- The exercise can be performed stepping forwards, backwards or sideways.

6. BOSU LUNGE (MODERATE/HARD)

- Stand on the floor facing a BOSU ball (about 60 centimetres from the edge of the BOSU), with feet hip-width apart with the toes pointing straight ahead.
- Step forward with one leg and centre that foot on top of the BOSU.
- Slowly flex the knees to a maximum depth of 90° of flexion.
- Allow the heel of the rear foot to lift so that the ball of the foot touches the floor.
- Pause at the end of the movement then press off the BOSU with the front leg and step back into the start position. Repeat the lunge starting with the other leg.
- Perform eight to 12 repetitions with each leg with perfect form.

7. OBSTACLE HOPS (MODERATE/HARD)

- Stand tall on one leg beside a low obstacle.
- Hop sideways over the obstacle and land on the same leg.
- Land as softly and quietly as possible, making contact with the whole foot.
- Hop back to the start position and repeat ten times.
- You can also perform this exercise facing the obstacle and hopping backwards and forwards instead of side to side.

8. MULTI-DIRECTIONAL LUNGE (HARD)

- Stand with good posture facing forward. (You will be lunging in five different directions and returning to this start position between each of these lunges.)
- **Front lunge:** step straight forward. Your shin should be perpendicular to the floor, with your back knee touching the floor.
- **Front 45° lunge:** Step 45° to the front. Keep your head and eyes forward, shoulders and pelvis square to the front, and allow the trailing leg to pivot naturally as you drop into the lunge.
- **Lateral lunge:** Step out to the side. Keep both feet facing forward and bend the leg you are stepping with.
- **Back 45° lunge:** Step back 45°. Keep your body facing forward and allow your back knee to drop down so that it touches the floor.
- **Back lunge:** Step straight back into the same position as a front lunge.
- Repeat the above stepping with the other leg to complete one set. Perform one to three sets.

Alex Shirley is a CHEK Institute-qualified exercise and lifestyle coach, registered with Fitness Australia. He combines his exercise background with his passion for the outdoors and runs a regular Trek Fitness Program in Sydney, is designed to prepare people for challenging treks: adventurefitness.com.au.



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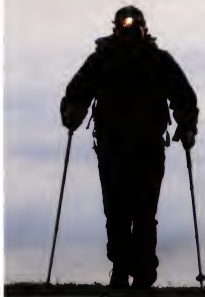
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Kimberley Capers

Short walks in the shadow of the Cockburn Ranges

Words and images: *Graham Cahill*

The only downside of walking in Western Australia is the tyranny of distance, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the impressive Kimberley region. Unless you're one of the lucky few who calls this region home, just getting here can be a major undertaking.

Once you do arrive, there are many opportunities for multiday bushwalks, however these can be daunting for the unprepared. The Kimberley is an extremely isolated and unforgiving landscape and getting the logistics right for a remote multiday walk can be the difference between life and death.

Epics aside, there are plenty of less demanding options that allow walkers a glimpse of the diverse and stunning environments the Kimberley offers, without the arduous planning required for more remote exploration.

The scope of this article will be contained within the not insignificant expanse that comprises El Questro Station. The primary reason for this is simply one of access. In the Kimberley, regardless of your intention – be it a day walk or a month-long range traverse – access into an area where roads are either rough or nonexistent is a major impediment.

El Questro is moderately easy to reach (although a four-wheel drive vehicle is still very much recommended) and it offers several great day walks. The station is also the perfect base from which to conduct daily excursions to walks and attractions of interest.

WHEN TO GO

The Kimberley region is dominated by two distinct weather patterns: the Wet and the Dry. Typically the Wet will curtail walking for the simple reason that all road access to most regions will be cut off or banned, while the dramatic water level increases mean that safety often can't be assured. During the Dry the landscape changes dramatically and life in the Kimberley becomes altogether more pleasant. Typically the Dry begins around May and can be expected to last until at least November. Early in the Dry is my preferred time to visit; tourist numbers are well down, campsites are all but empty and there is still plenty of water flowing into the numerous gorge and river systems.

SAFETY/WARNINGS

The Kimberley is vast and remote, and it must be treated with respect. Mobile phone coverage is non-existent in most places and the distances between outposts are large. Just getting to these locations will require prior planning and preparation, both for yourself and your chosen mode of transport. Once here, be sure you are well equipped with navigation, communication and rescue equipment (such as an EPIRB). While the walks detailed here are in no way extreme, it still pays to be prepared.

Several walks require scrambling and wading through deep and cold water, often over long distances up gorges. Care must be taken, as a broken ankle would make for a difficult recovery. Also of note is the fact that you are now in saltwater crocodile territory. If you are not sure whether swimming is safe, don't do it. Most of the gorge walks outlined here provide safe (and exceptionally pleasant) swimming, however the major river systems that you will come in contact with outside the gorge areas are all home to very large crocodiles. Also worthy of note are the presence of large scrub bulls. If encountered, these highly dangerous and unpredictable animals should always be avoided.



MAPS

Each of the day walks here can be comfortably undertaken using the mud maps provided courtesy of El Questro Station. Navigation is simple as most walks follow a well-defined landmark such as a gorge or major river. The mud maps are very well produced and offer a high level of information and plenty of detail for each walk. Of more importance in this region is your ability to navigate by road. Suitable road navigation equipment such as the Hema range of maps will be essential.

ACCESS, CAMPING AND WATER

El Questro Station is your primary base. There is no charge for entering the property, which is located part way along the historic Gibb River Road, with the closest town being Kununurra, approximately an hour and a half's drive away. The Gibb River Road requires a four-wheel drive vehicle, as there are a couple of shallow river crossings and the road

itself is likely to be heavily corrugated and rutted.

El Questro Station offers several choices for campers, from organised grassy sites inside the township, through to isolated individual bush camps alongside an idyllic river system, with the spectacular Cockburn Range as a backdrop. There is a small charge for camping in designated campsites, which also allows you access to basic amenities. Payment is made per vehicle and is good value at around \$15.

The closest alternative to camping at El Questro would be along the banks of the Pentecost River, just south of the El Questro turnoff on the Gibb River Road. The camping here is very close to crocodile habitat and caution must be taken. For the most part it is safe, however be aware that gathering water and fishing must be done with caution and you should most definitely not go swimming.

Getting water will often be the least of your concerns while in the Kimberley. However, the quality of the water in the gorges and rivers cannot be relied upon so, just as on any walk, come prepared with enough water to allow safe passage for the duration of your outing. Bear in mind that conditions can be extremely hot at certain parts of the year.

The walks

**EMMA GORGE**

Site of one of the more popular day walks in the area, Emma Gorge is located before the turnoff to El Questro, along the Gibb River Road. The gorge is actually part of the stunning Cockburn Ranges and is characterised by steep-sided rock walls and scree slopes for much of its length. The rock formations at the head of the walk are worth noting for their intricate patterns and striations.

The walk begins with an easy track that leads to Emma Creek, which you follow to the head of the gorge. Swamp bloodwood trees and thick grassland are plentiful along this section of the track. At this point Emma Creek is a fairly large and sprawling watercourse, but this was not always the case. In March 2005, Cyclone Ingrid dumped nearly 500 millimetres of rain on the area, causing the once-small creek to become a raging torrent. Hundreds of pandanus palms were lost and large amounts of silt and debris were deposited.

As you move north the track begins to get rockier, with some rock-hopping becoming necessary. To your west you will approach the lookout to Flagstaff Falls, which become an impressively violent flow during the Wet,

when they plunge 110 metres over the sheer gorge wall.

At just over the midway point, the gorge begins to close in and the track becomes increasingly rocky and boulder strewn. You will begin to notice the deep and inviting rock pools. These are safe to swim in.

As the gorge begins to narrow the shade increases, which, depending on the time of year, is a blessing. The rainforest in this section sits in stark contrast to the dry savanna previously found along the walk. The 90-metre cliff faces block most of the sunlight, making for damp conditions during most of the year.

Towards the head of the gorge Turquoise Pool is reached. This large body of water is an alternative swimming hole for those not wishing to continue over what has become more of a scramble than a walk. Large and slippery boulders block the way and the remainder of the walk is reasonably difficult.

The gorge ends abruptly in an amphitheatre of orange cliffs, over which flows a waterfall into a large deep pool at the base. Emma Gorge Pool is chilly to say the least, with temperatures ranging from 15°C to 20°C. This is the end point of the walk. A swim and a relaxing break on the

The reward for making to the end of the Emma Gorge walk: the impressive Emma Gorge Falls.

pebble beach are the order of the day before retracing your footsteps.

EL QUESTRO GORGE

One of the most challenging walks in the region, this is also the most rewarding. The track passes through a very narrow section of gorge, at times flanked on all sides by sheer cliffs and lined with dripping ferns and mosses. Several crystal clear pools are encountered *en route* and at times, especially further into the gorge, wading through chest-deep water is required.

The walk starts at the well-signposted car park at the end of the Emma Gorge access road off the Gibb River Road. The track heads due east through *livistona* palms and over small watercourses and is easy and relatively flat. This soon changes as the elevation increases and several rocky creek crossings must be negotiated.

As the track turns south, the route follows a steep-sided gorge wall. Bracken coats the



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The walks



cliffs all around this section, and massive rock figs grow towards the light at the top of the walls.

Just prior to the halfway point, a narrow and often wet passage through a rock barrier is required. Once through, you reach a large rock pool. From here on in, the track takes on a more adventurous feel, with more scrambling and wading than walking. Massive boulders bar the way and deep pools become the norm.

For those with a keen eye, a single figure painted in red ochre is visible on the west wall just after the midway point of the walk. It is important that paintings such as this one are in no way disturbed.

The walk continues through the Staircase Boulders. This 130-metre stretch of large

and slippery boulders requires some thoughtful negotiation. Once through the boulders, you are greeted with a small set of falls flowing through a very narrow and steep section of the gorge. The falls now become the track and are used to climb over this section.

Soon after you will come across a gorge and river junction. Take a left turn (southeast) and enter Mac Micking Gorge. Conditions narrow dramatically for the final section of the walk, which ends at Mac Micking Pool. Virtually no light reaches this section of the gorge and it's an exceptionally cool area. Once you are done relaxing and soaking up the silence, retrace your footsteps back to the car park and the start of the track.



A close encounter with a local. Left, a magic section of river partway along the Moonshine Gorge walk.

ZEBEDEE SPRINGS

The easiest and most relaxed walk in the region takes place in an area that's like a movie set. It is hard to imagine that such an environment hasn't been made to order. Zebedee Springs is not the most challenging or adventurous Kimberley walk, but it is one of the most scenic.

The springs are a series of permanent pools and small waterfalls, all thermally heated by a deep fault line. The crystal clear water remains a constant 28°C to 32°C. The walking route to the falls is lined with tall *livistonia* palms and, in places, steep gorge walls.

The track starts from the well-signposted car park and heads through open savanna woodland, with dry grasses and northern woollybutt, ironwoods and kurrajong trees making up the taller vegetation. This soon gives way to the *livistonia* forest where you notice a distinct change in vegetation and climate as the dense canopy provides shade and cooler conditions.

The gradient increases as you reach the springs, where some sections are wet underfoot. The springs themselves are a series of small pools, linked by a flowing creek, tumbling over small rocky ledges. It is possible to ascend these ledges and discover a pool to yourself, where a soak in the thermally heated water is as warm a welcome as you could hope to find.

Just recently a previously unknown isopod crustacean (a small, white, crab-like creature in layman's terms) was discovered in the springs. This crustacean is thought to exist nowhere else on earth. As a result you are requested to avoid slapping on sunscreen before entering the springs (wear protective clothing instead, although the springs are



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The walks

heavily shaded by the overhead canopy anyway). The return walk is made by retracing your path back to the car park.

AMALIA GORGE

Better described as a steep-sided valley rather than a true gorge, Amalia Gorge offers a walk with spectacular views and a much-appreciated swimming hole at the end of the track.

Amalia Gorge is very open and exposed. It can get hot, so it is best to undertake this walk during the early morning. The heat compounds the fact that the walk is fairly challenging, with numerous large obstacles requiring some climbing and clambering.

From the Amalia Gorge car park, the signposted start of the track heads due east along a rocky creek bed before entering the large gorge, shadowed to the north by a 350-metre-high scree slope. The track eventually narrows before crossing the creek and passing beneath a large rocky overhang. This feature provides a welcome shaded rest spot, with the sound of the creek as a backdrop. When we visited, the overhang was home to a mass of beautiful butterflies.

From here the walk becomes a little more difficult. Large boulders are encountered that must be climbed over or scrambled around before you reach Amalia Squeeze. This is a small and narrow pass with a four-metre drop-off to the side. Pass packs through this and don't attempt to cross if you suffer from vertigo or are unsure of your footing. Just beyond you reach the aptly named Ochre Falls, where again you are confronted with another narrow pass, although this is nowhere near as severe as Amalia Squeeze.

The gorge narrows here and the track runs alongside the cliff wall and a deep pool. There is a short climb to exit this section, which should only be attempted by the confident.

**THE BOAB – AN UPSIDE-DOWN ICON**

An icon of the Kimberley is the famous *Adansonia gregorii*, or the boab. The boab is related to the Madagascar and African baobab tree, which look virtually identical, however the Kimberley boab is only found in this select pocket of the world.

It is thought that the boab arrived via seeds carried across the oceans to the Kimberley shore. It is also widely accepted that the trees may have been here since way back when Africa and Australia were still part of the one continent.

While not an exceptionally tall tree, the base of the boab more than makes up for its lack of height. The girth on some may reach upwards of 20 metres. The combination of its stumpy nature coupled with this enormous circumference, give the boab its distinctive character.

During the Dry, the boab sheds its leaves, exposing the spindly branches which are left to fan out from the base, giving it an upside down appearance, as if its roots are in the air. Over the years the boab has been put to many uses both by Indigenous inhabitants and settlers. Food and shelter have long been boab attributes but they have also been used as jails and lookouts. Their most recent claim to fame comes as a result of the use of young plant roots as a much sought after gourmet ingredient in many of the world's top restaurants.

The remainder of the walk is fairly straightforward, the hardest part being the slog along the (at times) very hot and dry creek bed to reach the head of the valley and Amalia Pool. The pool is rimmed by cliff faces and features a 30-metre-high waterfall. To say it is an inviting site is an understatement. Take your time getting your breath back before making the return journey through the gorge.

MOONSHINE GORGE

The only circuit walk in the area, Moonshine Gorge follows an open creek, before climbing up into dry and rugged savannah woodlands. The start of the track begins with a large waterhole, marking the start of the Moonshine Gorge, but there is no need to rush in for a swim as plenty of opportunities present themselves further into the walk.

You are required to cross the river just after the start of the gorge (it's worth noting that this is a much wider gorge than others previously described) before continuing upstream past some fantastic views of the surrounding sandstone escarpment.

The track opens up here and shade becomes a precious commodity. You pass by

a long waterhole lined with paper bark trees before crossing the creek and climbing a steep, rocky bank on the other side. This leads you to Sprung Hole, which is the perfect spot for a rest and a swim. This is also the suggested turn around point for those that do not wish to tackle the remaining loop.

Continuing on, the track takes a left hand turn on to what is called the Speewah Valley Track. This is an old four-wheel drive track that was once used to access the valley during cattle mustering operations. The remainder of this track is exposed, offering no shade, no swimming and some steep gradients.

The climb up on to the escarpment is arduous and not recommend in the hottest part of the day. The reward for your effort is a fantastic vista over the Cockburn Ranges, as well as views back to the start of Moonshine Gorge. The loop finally winds itself back to the beginning and that large pool you walked past at the start, which by now is about the best looking body of water in the area.

Graham Cahill is a professional photographer and writer who runs Ecomuse Images, he enjoys spending time in the Kimberley when he can.



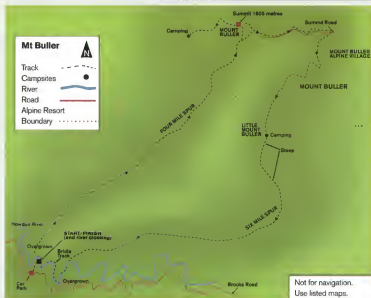
Tricky to find, this single ochre figure is painted high on the gorge wall, far up El Questro Gorge.

Up Four, Down Six

A spectacular but civilised spur circuit on Mt Buller

Words and photos Rob Kettels

Most people associate Mt Buller with the ski resort, but the mountain is far more than just a winter playground. Away from the village are pristine spurs offering the most dramatic alpine profiles on this continent. The most famous is the West Ridge, but it is a well-trodden path and a relatively short outing from the road. Far below, on the Howqua River, Four Mile Spur and Six Mile Spur begin their sinuous rise to the summit. The overnight bushwalk that follows Four Mile Spur to the summit and returns down Six Mile Spur is a well-kept secret that delivers close-up views of Buller's dramatic South Face and majestic panoramas over The Bluff and Crosscut Saw. It requires a good head for heights in places, particularly when scrambling over exposed rock set high up on Six Mile Spur, yet for all of its ruggedness the route is easy to follow and any fit, confident bushwalker can tackle it. To make the 1335-metre ascent more enjoyable, book accommodation in Mt Buller village with one of the many ski clubs or chalets. Staying in the village means you can climb without heavy camping equipment, giving this outing a quality European flavour. But possibly the most satisfying part is enjoying a well-earned beer in one of the village's bars after finishing the long climb up Four Mile Spur to the summit.



Flat). Drive along the gravel road until reaching Sheeppark Flat, where the road's name changes to Brooks Road. Pass Sheeppark Flat and the Tunnel Bend campsites, enter the Alpine National Park and arrive at the car park above Gardiners Hut.

Alternatively, take the Eastern Freeway and Maroondah Highway to Lilydale, then take the Melba Highway at Coldstream to Yea, follow the first description above after Yea.

CAMPING

Until it reaches the Mt Buller Alpine Resort boundary, the lower portion of this walk is within the Alpine National Park. Beyond this the land is managed by the Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board on behalf of the Crown. Camping is not permitted within the Mt Buller Alpine Resort, yet there are camping options on the West Ridge and Little Mount Buller outside the resort boundary.

The first option if you are camping is to get a morning start on Four Mile Spur, reaching the summit early, then descending the West Ridge to the tree line, which marks the end of the resort boundary, meaning you can camp there. This is my preferred option and it also enables you to walk the famous section of the West Ridge.

The second option is to walk up Six Mile Spur and camp on the large flat area 75 metres south of Little Mt Buller, which is still within the Alpine National Park. You can then reach the summit the following day and descend Four Mile Spur.

The third option is to start at Mt Buller village and descend Six Mile Spur, camp at Gardiners Hut and then ascend Four Mile Spur next day. To book accommodation call 1800 285 537 or email reservations@mtbuller.com.au.

FOOD/WATER

There is no water available on either spur, except for a few creeks high on the mountain. A mini-mart in the village is open year-round. In winter there is a large choice of restaurants and bars, most of which supply good quality meals at a reasonable(ish) price. But hey, you deserve it, because you have just climbed 1335 metres to the summit, a big day in anyone's book. A list of restaurants and bars is available at www.mtbuller.com.au/winter/bars.aspx.

MAPS

There are a number of maps available: Vicmap 1:50 000 *Buller*, Outdoor Leisure Map 1:25 000 *Buller-Stirling* and Outdoor Recreation Guide 1:50 000 *Buller-Howitt Alpine Area*.

WHEN TO GO

It is possible to do this walk year round and each season has its own appeal. Winter is the most beautiful time, with snow defining the alpine zones; displays of beautiful alpine flowers appear in spring; summer obviously offers warmer conditions, but autumn has the most stable weather. There are some seasonal factors that need to be considered in the village too: in the off-season (summer and autumn) there are fewer accommodation and restaurant options, while mid-winter is the opposite, and you'll have to book accommodation weeks, even months ahead.

SAFETY/WARNINGS

Six Mile Spur is one of Australia's craggiest major spurs and an ascent involves scrambling over steep, exposed rocks high on the mountain. If you are fit, the scrambling sections should not cause any major problems and are actually a lot of fun. On the lower section of Six Mile Spur there is no track. The spur is obvious and easy to follow, but some basic navigation knowledge is still required.

ACCESS

From Melbourne, follow the Hume Highway to the Tallarook turn-off and take the Upper Goulburn Road to the Goulburn Valley Highway, which leads you to Yea. From Yea drive to Mansfield on the Maroondah Highway, then follow Mt Buller Road to approximately two kilometres past Merrijig before turning right on to the Howqua Track, (signposted Sheeppark

Walk



THE WALK

The names Four Mile Spur and Six Mile Spur are not related to their length but to their position along the Howqua River. Located on the banks of the Howqua, nestled away among mature deciduous trees, is Gardiners Hut. This old stockman-style hut with a distinctive chimney marks the start and finish of the walk. A walking track leads down to the river from a car park located just off Brocks Road above.

Take your shoes and socks off and ford the river behind the hut, or go 150 metres downstream to where a bridge path meets the river before crossing. The track marked on the map is overgrown, so continue up a steep embankment through scrubby undergrowth, climb up the side of the spur for 250 metres on a 342° bearing until you reach the top. Here you will find a light track that weaves a gentle path along the spine of Four Mile Spur. Glimpses of The Bluff appear through a thick canopy of trees.

The track meanders through avenues of ghost-white mountain gums. Gradually the spur narrows and, at 1200 metres, unfolds to become a rocky sub-alpine scarp. From here, there are dramatic views of the West

Ridge and the precipitous wall that makes up the South Face. A sole mature mountain gum guards the end of the rocky section before the track re-enters the tall montane forest with its sweet, intoxicating smell. As you follow the yellow markers nailed to trees, the spur broadens and becomes

Jenni Calzini scrambles her way up a narrow section on Four Mile Spur. The distant West Ridge has a dusting of snow. Below, the author begins the steep section on Six Mile Spur, with the Howqua River far below. Jenni Calzini





Tasmania's Tarkine Rainforest Track

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Walk

rocky underfoot. The stones here are important habitat for the endangered mountain pygmy possum.

The tall forest finally makes way for sub-alpine snow gums. The route eventually meets a management vehicle track, marking an end to the winding track. Follow the unsealed vehicle track upwards, and after a couple of switchbacks you'll reach a large ski barrier fence. Pass through the fence and turn left on to a winter ski run. Walk downhill towards a ski lift with Mt Buller's summit straight ahead. From the base of the ski lift, tramp steeply up towards the summit. The direct route goes through a rocky gully and is quite steep, while a gentler, but longer, alternative takes the east shoulder before turning towards the summit past the top chairlift.

The last few hundred metres traverses trashed alpine herbfield. On top is a pyramid-shaped fire lookout. Soak up extensive views of farmland in the west, unfamed mountains to the southeast and Mt Stirling in the northeast.

If you are camping, walk down the West Ridge until you meet the tree line, but if you're staying in the village, go back down the paved stairs and follow a high wooden barrier until you get to a car park, from where a road leads down to the village. While wandering down you can decide whether to celebrate with a beer first or later.



DAY TWO

Six Mile Spur starts behind Little Mt Buller, however getting down to Little Mt Buller from the village can be tricky through the maze of ski runs. Take the Avenue to Standard Run, follow Standard Run until it merges with the Whiskey Creek Trail, and then follow that to reach a signed junction on Little Buller Spur. Take the well-defined track up to Little Mt Buller. (The online maps found at the following website might also help: www.snowholidays.com.au/mt-buller-maps.html.)

Just beyond Little Mt Buller the ridge dramatically changes, becoming narrow, steep and rocky. Looking down the ridge is



Right, Jenni Calzini slowly works her way down Six Mile Spur's rugged bluffs and narrow ridgeline. Above, huge vistas and huge cliffs adorn Six Mile Spur.

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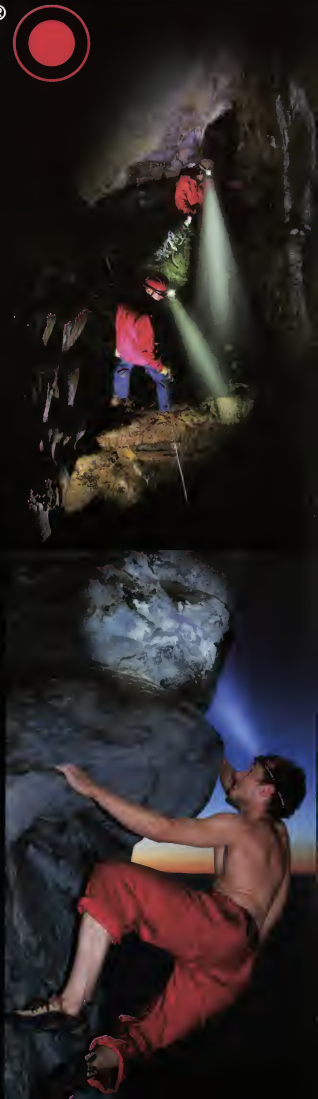
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Walk



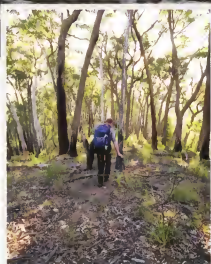
initially confronting, but if you break it down into small sections it is never particularly difficult. There are some rock outcrops that need to be sidled because they end at steep bluffs. Watch your footing when turning the outcrops because it is quite crumbly.

Continue down the ridge – which you may find reminiscent of New Zealand or the Scottish Highlands – scrambling along the tops of true alpine terrain. For me, possibly only the western spurs of the Sentinel and Watson Crag can match Mt Buller's Six Mile Spur for ruggedness.

Amid the rough-cut beauty, keep an eye out for fake spurs that lead nowhere. At 1426 metres the ridge divides. Take the spur that kinks out to the east then leads down to point 1071 metres. Eventually the difficulty and the angle of the route ease, just prior to it entering a tall forest. There is a shallow saddle before point 1071 metres, and the spur then curves around to the west.

Wander down towards point 988 metres, enjoying the gently rounded top as you go – even though there is no track, this makes for superb walking and the view back to Mt Buller gives it the impression of grandeur.

Four Mile Spur can be seen ahead and eventually the sounds of rushing water will tickle your ears, as you near the river. The



THE WALK AT A GLANCE

Grade:	Moderate to hard with scrambling sections
Length:	Two days
Distance:	23 kilometres
Type:	Spur walking
Region:	Southern Mt Buller
Nearest town:	Mt Buller
Start/finish:	Gardiners Hut
Best time:	August/spring/all year round when fine weather is forecast

Special points: A decent level of fitness is required for this walk. Before attempting it you should gain a minimum level of spur walking experience by doing the Staircase on Mt Bogong or equivalent.

The distinctive pyramid-shaped fire lookout marks the summit of Mt Buller, while the silhouette of Jenni Calzini frames the setting sun. Left, delightful easy walking on the lower part of Six Mile Spur, simply walking heaven! Calzini

last part of the spur is steep and enters undergrowth at the river. Bush bash down to where Six Mile Spur, South Buller Creek and the Howqua River meet.

The easiest way to get back to Gardiners Hut is to wade – boots and all. The alternative is to cross the river and climb up the opposite bank to a bridge track (unmarked on the map) that skirts the bank. After one kilometre the track drops back down to the river and crosses it several times until, finally, Gardiners Hut appears. Make the last river crossing over to the hut and it is then only 100 metres up the hill to the car park.

On the drive out, you might catch a glimpse of Mt Buller and the crags on Six Mile Spur and I'm sure you will see the mountain in a new light from then on.

Rob Kettels has bushwalked since the age of ten. Even when he is not in wilderness, his head still is. He now climbs big mountains around the globe but considers it high-altitude bushwalking, and reckons that the smell of eucalyptus trees can't be beaten.



FIT FOR THE FURNACE

Our new wildman, *Dr Steve Van Dyck*, explores the incredible world of animal specialisation

When you think of 'survival of the fittest', do you have visions of (fit) lions chasing (unfit) wildebeests across dung-enriched rivers boiling with (fittest, ergo fattest) crocodiles? The answer is probably no, because Wild readers are already aware that fitness usually has little to do with bad-boy biceps and yellow fangs; it's a matter of top physical condition to tackle the job you're specialised for.

Olympic pole-vaulters don't have to compete against butterfly swimmers to prove equal levels of fitness. Pubic lice ('crabs' or *Phthirus pubis*), universally itched and despised, are just as fit given their steamy workplace as highly specialised acorn woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) adjusting their nuts.

There are some places, though, where life just cannot be contemplated. And here in Australia we boast landscapes so bleak as to defy the concept of sustainable existence. Yet sometimes all it takes is to scratch the surface to find astonishing examples of animals fitted to the harshest places this continent has on offer.

Last year two colleagues from the Queensland Museum and I set off west from Brisbane to try and find some rare native mice that hadn't been seen live in Queensland since 1937, when a house cat presented eight plains mice (*Pseudomys australis*) to pastoralist Frederick Berner on his drought-ravaged property 'Barcarolle' near Jundah.

Berner sent their small broken bodies to the museum but, up until very recently, these specimens represented the only records from Queensland. Early last year, however, there was an extraordinary breakthrough by way of a small bag of owl vomit collected by a keen ranger in 2001. He'd been investigating caves in the sandstone bluffs overlooking the Diamantina River in far-western Queensland and found a

pile of black, ping pong ball-sized pellets on the floor of one of these rock shelters.

Barn owl vomit is something that makes museum researchers salivate. This embarrassing reaction has its roots in the twinkling treasures that come packaged up in the pellets. When an owl rips a rat's head off and swallows it whole, then downs the rest of the body in one gulp, it doesn't have to worry about the horrors of passing all those knobbly bones, sharp teeth and wads of fur in conventional ring-tearing manner. Once the acid bath of the owl's stomach and its churning gizzard have dissolved meat from bone, the owl looks uncomfortable, wiggles its head from side to side and spits up a dry bolus that contains all the rat's bones and teeth neatly packed and padded in the same fur coat that covered it on its way down. Pure fur and bone, no smells, no streaks on the porcelain.

73 years. So in April last year, soon after the discovery, we strapped our live traps and jerry cans to the roof of a Landcruiser and headed west.

When the chips are down and animals are sparse, spotlighting for rats and mice from a four-wheel drive can be mind-numbingly boring. After fruitless hours on stark, treeless gibber plains, a driver can be soundly asleep for a good portion of that time without the rest of the crew noticing. And, depending on the weight of the evening meal, by 2 am colleagues behind their spotlights might be snoring while their lights dangle out the windows, sweeping the horizon in a fine imitation of diligent searching. This operation works pretty efficiently until someone is actually conscious when a mouse dashes past. Then chaos erupts.

In the front passenger seat I yelled and banged on the dashboard, John the driver woke

Spotlighting for rats and mice from a four-wheel drive can be mind-numbingly boring. After fruitless hours on stark, treeless gibber plains, a driver can be soundly asleep for a good portion of that time without the rest of the crew noticing.

A microscopic examination of those bits can tell a trained eye exactly the species of prey the owl has been eating within a ten-kilometre radius from the spit site. In 2009, a careful look inside the regurgitated Diamantina pellets resulted in the extraction of two smashed up rodent skulls, undeniably those of the endangered plains mouse. The cracking soils of Diamantina National Park are approximately 240 kilometres northwest from Barcarolle, close enough for even endangered mice to spread in

up and slammed on the brakes and Heather, with the butterfly net, jumped out of the back passenger seat ready to sprint after the mouse. But in that time the rodent had streaked off across the gibbers, so we revved up and set off in hot pursuit. This, I thought, was an example of clear and decisive thinking given the faraway places some of us were visiting just seconds before...except for the strange resonating grunts I could hear through my window.

In a horror of confusion that still turns my

bowels to water today, I looked back to see a body twisting and dragging in the dust alongside the speeding car. In our haste, Heather had tried to get back into the truck but had gotten tangled in the long dangling ends of the luggage strapping tapes I'd carelessly thrown into the back seat. With one hand grabbing the window frame and the other pushing off the body of the truck she was being swivelled and played towards the rumbling rear wheel. I screamed an imaginative combination of expletives at John, who, with visions of the mouse burning on his retinas, was still accelerating and had no idea what was happening.

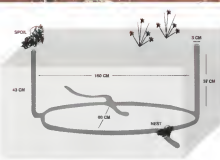
We jumped out to find Heather shaking from shock, centimetres from the back wheel and apologising for not getting in the car quick enough. Miraculously, she was dusty but unbroken and by now, wide enough awake to run after and eventually net the mouse. As if luck would reward our near catastrophe, the rodent was not a plains mouse but a fawn hopping-mouse (*Notomys cervinus*), one of the most exquisitely delicate of all Australia's 60 living native rodents. To have caught one of these gems was significant for us but later we would discover something about this mouse more extraordinary than how fast it could run.

At a bit after midnight, spotlighting over the glassy surface of a 12 square kilometre god-forsaken, treeless claypan, we hit on another hopping-mouse scampering along. This time I leapt out to chase it over a crazy zigzagging 100 metres until it disappeared down a hole. Given our desperation to identify the species of hopping-mouse below ground (there are five living species in Australia), and knowing that virtually nothing was written regarding hopping-mouse burrows, we decided to excavate under torchlight.

A quick flash around showed that the three centimetre-wide hole the mouse had dived into had a sister hole, probably an exit burrow, 1.3 metres away. So, before beginning, we spread a butterfly net over the entrance hole then started shovelling from the inner side of other vertical shaft. When we'd dug to a depth of 43 centimetres, the burrow took a right-angle bend to lead horizontally in a wide arc toward the entrance hole. As we carefully scooped off successive biscuits of silt while following the burrow, a sudden bouncing inside the butterfly net announced the arrival of a hopping-mouse rocketing out from the entrance hole. We carefully extracted this beautiful adult female and put her in a soft calico holding bag.

But then, another 90 centimetres along the burrow, I saw some movement in the soft silt

and pulled out a tiny furred baby, then another and another...until four nestlings, with eyes as yet unopened, were taken from a nesting chamber that had the sparsest covering of chewed up grass stems for a mattress. On such a cool night the chamber was palpably warm and humid, so we put the pups in a bag with a hot-water bottle.



A schematic of the hopping-mouse burrow. Top, few Australians would credit that such an exquisite native mammal as the fawn hopping-mouse (*Notomys cervinus*) could live below the harshest claypans of the arid interior. Dick Whitford.

A further 40 centimetres along we struck the bottom of the entrance pipe (the one with the butterfly net waiting on top), but the burrow didn't end there, it swung around and led in another wide arc back to the bottom of the other vertical burrow. While we carefully excavated the second half of the burrow ellipse, another hopping-mouse suddenly erupted from a tunnel and started springing in all directions around the open depression of the excavation. Ricocheting off the six frenzied arms and 30 fingers flailing from all sides of the pit to grab it, it made one big mistake and executed a misjudged leap right up the inside of my shirt. Fearing the fruity atmosphere of my armpit might prove the undoing of the poor mouse, we quickly reunited it with the adult female and four pups. Within minutes the female was quietly suckling the young.

By about 2 am we'd finished the excavation, caught (and released) yet another (sub-adult) mouse trying to dig its way out and had a

revelation about hopping-mouse burrow architecture. The system was like a big elliptical ring lowered horizontally by two pipes some 40 centimetres down into the silt. With pop holes at either 'end' of the loop the mice could escape from snakes and other predators from almost anywhere within the system. With the nesting chamber positioned in an expanded section of the main burrow and not in a blind chamber, even if nestlings were too young to escape, the reproducing adult(s) could. And the provision of a few blind chambers meant that, even when completely cut off, individuals like the sub-adult we'd let go could start furiously digging toward the surface and make a getaway.

But we left scratching our heads. It's hard enough closing your eyes and bringing your index fingers together in front of your face; how, in the dark digging process 40 centimetres underground, do the mice perfectly connect the ends of the horizontal loop?

Viewing the claypan from about five kilometres above on Google Earth you practically need sunnies to zoom in on these blindingly bleak sites. No trees, no ground cover, no shade and Chernobyl summer temperatures that turn frigid by mid-year. Yet fawn hopping-mice thrive there, drinking no water and eating dry grass seeds that blow in on the incessant southeasterly winds. The nocturnal habits of these little mice gives them a nightlife in cool contrast to fiery daytime conditions and their burrows provide constantly moist, comfortable ambience for the processes of raising young, avoiding predators and relaxing.

Whenever I sneak a look at those little hoppers now, curled up asleep on top of one another and breeding happily here at the Queensland Museum, I wish all Australians could see some of the exquisite native alternatives we have to compete with our stereotypic icons, namely comatose koalas and introduced dingoes.

Having said that, my next reaction is to steady myself for the inevitable spike of adrenalin that reams my sinuses clear and flashes me back to legs tangled in strapping tape and a night that was microns from disaster. When it comes to the desert, survival of the fittest, lions and wildebeests, men or mice, I quickly defer to the rodents and rush back to my air-conditioned office. There at least I can feel smug reading emails and drinking coffee, I'd like to see a hopping-mouse try that.

Dr Steve Van Dyck is the Senior Curator of Vertebrates at the Queensland Museum and Wild's newest regular columnist.

Light my way

Surveyor: Beau Miles

DIARY ENTRY MAY 2001

I am breathing fog underground. Red fingers bump over wet rocks, guiding me through the subterranean boulder maze. A narrow, yellow halo lights my world. Nothing else exists, but it doesn't matter, the route is marked by smoothed-edges or a sliver of ripped clothing wedged between rocks. The yellow beam lighting the way slowly fades. To save the last of the cold batteries I turn off the headtorch. It is ink black. A wall of nothingness. I twist the headtorch bevel on my forehead back on to see where I've come from, then, in the opposite direction, shine the last of my light toward the 'ball room' where I'm heading. The light, with heart-raising speed, dissolves to black. My batteries are dead. Demons can appear in the mind's eye if you're not careful. I hold my breath and the only movement I feel is the thick thudding of my heart, shuddering my body in this alien world.

The above diary entry is from the days of the bulb, the incandescent, hot-burning, breakable bulb. My caving experience in a deep, green ravine of Vermont in the US was not a particularly dangerous one, but it was thought provoking. A world without light is intimidating. Back then I waited a few minutes for my cave buddy to appear. He had batteries, more knowledge of the cave and a wry smile in exchange for my 'she'll be right' Australian attitude.

Modern day headtorches, although sharing some of the attributes of my Vermont torch a decade ago, are vastly different from the carbide flame units of early miners. Like all modern gear, the transition in technology has come thick and fast in the modern, micro era. Smaller, lighter, longer lasting, more powerful, more playful, more durable, more features, cheaper, the LED (light emitting diode) has created a revolution in headtorch design and utility. For the purposes of continuity,

surveyed here are headtorches in the lightweight, LED, 3AAA battery range (with one exception, the Snowgum Dynamo). We have also stuck to torches with the light and battery unit at the front (again, with one exception: the Led Lenser H7 Headlight – Led Lenser don't make an all-in-one unit). If you are thinking of a light versatile unit for bushwalking, camping, night-running, ski/kayak/cycle touring these headtorches will all fit your agenda.



Walkers in the Tarkine Glen Turvey

**PETZL TIKKA XP2**

If the old classic was the Petzl Zoom, then the new-era classic would have to be the Tikka XP2. A *tikka*, by definition, is actually a mark made on the forehead by Hindus and, while you will indeed have a glowing forehead, that's where the similarity ceases. In any given night of camp activity the Tikka is made for continued, comfortable, trouble-free use and – just to dispel any doubt – it doesn't leave a mark on your forehead. There are three light settings: full, half or strobe. It also has a nifty battery indicator and single red-eye LED for night vision. The strobe function is by far the most intense I have ever been stupid enough to gun barrel. While it is said to be water-resistant, I'd still snug it under the jacket hood in rain. Its weakest link is the battery door that closes with a plastic clip, making it vulnerable to breaking, while the case tends to be drafty along the sides, exposing a silver of internal metal. A great product from a long-serving manufacturer of superb headtorches.

KATHMANDU XP-E CREE Q4 HEADTORCH

Any unit with an inbuilt SOS sequence must be ideal for getting to some serious places. Light output varies with a dimmer and focus control, while the flash emits an even pulse for up to 30 hours. This torch sells itself for professional use with four LEDs: WHITE, RED, GREEN AND BLUE. Operated with a separate button, red is for night use, blue is for hunting (differentiating between blood and other liquids) and green is for map reading. Vocationally, this unit would suit search and rescue outfits, trip leaders, backcountry guides and killers. At 96 grams and producing an impressive 125 lumens, this is a solid product worth spending money on, however the price tag of \$120 seems pretty steep considering most of us don't need all its capabilities. Overall design (casing, headband, rounded edges) is terrific, but less may mean more for the average person heading into the wilds.

TACTICAL PRO REBEL 100

Rather than being a rectangle like the others headtorches on test, the Tactical Pro houses the batteries in a screw-capped tube, with a large lens mounted to the side. However, its unique design is its functional downfall. The cylindrical battery case has no reference for which way the battery cartridge is re-inserted (for correct polarity) and is so snug that you'll regret having clipped your fingernails when swapping the batteries. The 100 in the name refers to the fact that it produces 100 lumens of bright white light, so it fares well in the output category. However, the switch – a rotating wheel which takes you through the small LED, red LED and booming main LED – is very stiff. The locking feature is the saving grace of this operating wheel – no more flat batteries as it gets tossed around in the top of the pack. I wouldn't go running with this torch – the large lens and overall weight (131 grams) puts the unit some 70 millimetres from your forehead, making it unwieldy and heavier than other designs – but it's not all bad. It's bombproof, has a super-tight battery pack and is water-resistant. It would do well for tours where you want a top product, but are not too worried about weight.

BLACK DIAMOND SPOT

At 85 grams the Spot was the lightest unit on test (just), but despite its light weight it doesn't lack for features. It has a one-watt LED that is great for dazzling possums and three SuperBright LEDs for use around camp – which is what most people will use the majority of the time. The switch is easy to use, a full press moves you between modes, while a half press changes the light settings: high, medium, low and flashing. The Spot is comfortable on the head and the hinge seems pretty good, holding the chosen angle without flopping around. It isn't waterproof, but it is supposed to be protected from splashing from any angle. Getting the batteries in without long fingernails is tricky, but otherwise straightforward. This is a solid, well-thought out model for general camping and walking, which is also very reasonably priced.





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LED LENSER H7 HEADLIGHT

While the H7 is the only headtorch in the survey that has a rear component, it's still small enough to warrant being included in the lightweight class. There are obvious benefits to keeping the LED housing and batteries separate: namely a counter-balanced fit and the ability to have a more developed lens. However, few lightweight designs still use the split body system and with good reason: they're more complicated, slightly larger and heavier, and can tangle in the top pocket of your pack. Further, the thin elastic strap will wear out faster than the wider, thicker band used by others. The deep lens is what gives the LED an outstanding crisp, white light (140 lumens) though – it's so bright you could be forgiven for thinking an Audi was heading your way – making it an excellent headtorch for those who like to run around in the bush at night.

**PRINCETON TEC EOS**

Similar to the Tikka in look and feel, this is perhaps the most indispensable of all the headtorches tested. While it has the technology of a regulated LED and optic collimators, it looks and feels like a no-frills unit. Not bad, simply good engineering. Unlike modern cars with endless gadgets and plastic, meaning more things can go wrong, this single-eyed package looks almost like you could hand it down as an heirloom. It's waterproof (to one metre) and comes with a single, large button to guide you through the four light choices; high, medium, low and a basic flash. The battery gate is the most impressive design aspect, beautiful in fact, with a lathed brass screw to snug in the batteries. To be picky, the lens tends to be slightly opaque, lacking the high-end clarity of the Tikka and offering only 50 lumens. The 113 hours of light (on high) equates to 26 weekends away without a battery change.

**SNOWGUM DYNAMO**

Built for the school-camp explosion, this little Dynamo is literally that: a battery-less LED headtorch. It heavier than most of the units and the bulkiest of the tested lights, but doubles as a bike light (adapter included). The Dynamo is not the slickest of devices, but value for money is terrific. For under \$30 you would expect some functionality setbacks, and there are several: unclipping the torch from the headband to wind the device is annoying, while the noisy little winder will keep neighboring campers awake during a late-night reading session (speaking of which, it tends to sag a little to the side when lying down). Its free energy will happily shine until the device falls apart, which shouldn't happen all that soon – with teenage abuse in mind the construction is solid.

**TECH SPEAK: LUMENS, REGULATED LEDS AND OPTIC COLLIMATORS**

- A lumen is a unit derived by the International System of Units for measuring light output and is essentially a measure of the power of light perceived by the human eye.
- Most headtorches use unregulated LEDs, which mean that they burn very brightly at first but gradually dim as the battery runs down. When a headtorch has a 'regulated LED' it simply means that the LED will burn at a constant brightness for as long as the batteries have enough voltage.
- I had never heard of 'optic collimators' before writing this survey and a quick search on Wiki didn't enlighten me much – physics is not my thing. For a simple explanation I went to the Princeton Tec website: 'A collimator gathers all available light from an LED in the form of scattered rays and re-emits the light as parallel rays, making it more optically efficient than a standard reflector.' So there you go, sounds pretty techy.

BRAND AND MODEL	LUMENS (MAXIMUM)	BURN TIME (HOURS)	WEIGHT, INCLUDING BATTERIES (GRAMS)	LED NUMBER AND TYPE	RRP, \$
Black Diamond Spot	50	50 (one watt at high), 100 (three SuperBrights at high)	85	A single one watt LED and three SuperBright LEDs	90
Kathmandu XP-E Cree Q4 Headtorch	125	ten hours (high)	96	One XP-E Q4 Cree LED and four coloured LEDs (blue for hunting, green for map reading, red for night vision)	120
Led Lenser H7 Headlight	140	75 (high)	117	One white high performance Cree LED	100
Petzl Tikka XP	Around 60	80 (high) or 160 hours (low)	88	One HighOutput white LED and one red LED	110
Princeton Tec EOS	50	113 (high), 115 (medium) or 121 (low)	105	One regulated Maxbright white LED	100
Snowgum Dynamo	Not available (less than 50)	Burn time after one minute winding: at max 20 – 30 minutes	100	Three white LEDs	30
Tactical Pro Rebel 100	100	Ten (high), 100 (0.5 millimetre white led) or 28 (0.5 millimetre red LED)	138	One luxeon rebel 100, one 0.5 millimetre nichia white and two 0.5 millimetre nichia red LEDs	100

All specifications supplied by the manufacturer.

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Alpine Ski Touring. Image by Sam Bosward

Wild Diary



May

Autumn 12 hr R
1 May, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R
2 May, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

WildEndurance BR
1-3 May, NSW
www.wildendurance.org.au

Bush Rogaine 3/6/9 hr R
9 May, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

**Sri Chinmoy Yerrabi/
Mulligans Flat Multisport
M**
9 May, ACT
<http://au.srichinmoyraces.org>

North Face 100 BR
15-16 May, NSW
www.thenorthface.com.au/100/

XPD Expedition Race M
17-28 May, Qld
www.xpd.com.au/

**Kathmandu Adventure
Series M**
22 May, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

**Australian Mountain
Running Championships BR**
22 May, ACT
www.mountainrunning.coolrunning.com.au

Rogaine 8 hr R
22 May, Vic
www.rogaine.asn.au

**SE Qld 9 hr
Adventure Race M**
22 May, Qld
www.blackheartevents.com.au

The Gold Rush BR
30 May, Qld
<http://adventurereporting.info/events/trail-running>

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June

Keep Ultra 100km/75km BR
6 June, WA
www.Keepultra.com

Adventure Race 24/12 hr BR
12-13 June, NSW
www.blackheartevents.com.au/

Urban Max R
19 June, QLD
www.maxadventure.com.au

Paddy Pallin 6 hr R
20 June, NSW
www.rogaine.asn.au

6/12 hr R
26 June, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

12 hr R
26 June, NT
www.rogaine.asn.au

3/9/24 hr R
26-27 June, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

State Championships 24 hr R
26-27 June, WA
www.rogaine.asn.au

**July
Tough Bloke Challenge BR**
3 July, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

Tough Bloke Challenge BR
3 July, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

**State Championships
8/15/24 hr R**
24-25 July, Qld
www.rogaine.asn.au

Winter 4 hr R
25 July, ACT
www.rogaine.asn.au

**Caboorture Historical
Village Nat 48hr/State
24hr BR**
30 July-1 August, Qld
<http://geoffrains.com/?p=200>

**Kathmandu Adventure
Series M**
31 July, NSW
www.maxadventure.com.au

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Activities: BR bush running, M multisports, P paddling, O orienteering, R rogaine. Rogaine events are organised by the State rogaine associations. Canoeing events are organised by the State canoeing associations unless otherwise stated.

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AUSTRALIA



Oh baby

For ultimate family flexibility, Tatonka has released a Baby Carrier backpack. The pack is designed for babies who can sit up independently, weighing up to 15 kilograms, (depending on mum or dad's enthusiasm). Reportedly it's pretty comfy for all concerned, featuring an adjustable, cushy seat for baby and a height-adjustable padded carrying system for mum or dad. Fulfilling all of the basic safety requirements, it also has some extra features, including a safety whistle (we suggest that you don't draw attention to this feature if your child is old enough to play with it). Other accessories include a sunshade, an integrated bib and lots of useful pockets for other baby essentials, plus you can attach an additional bag for longer walks, ensuring that your child can develop an appreciation of nature while resting in the lap of luxury. The Baby Carrier retails at \$299.95. www.outdoorsurvival.com.au.



Natural base layers (technically)

New Zealand reliable Icebreaker has just released the GT series – a 'revolutionary, high-performance base layer' that is 'the ultimate fusion of nature and technology'. Yup, it's a thermal. But it's a really nice one. New Zealand merino wool is a material that's light, breathable and odour resistant, while the four per cent Lycra keeps the garment shapely. It's ideally suited for aerobic sports and feels all sorts of lovely to the touch. Featuring a variety of colours and styles, the GT base layers also come in different weights for different activities. We liked the medium lightweight 'chase crew' style (RRP \$149.95), which is long-sleeved with funky little thumb rings, and has a generous length in the body. It is pocket- and zip-free, and sits close to the body, acting as a second skin. It's pretty comfy. In fact, we may not be giving the sample back. GT series baselayer garments retail upwards from \$129.95. Visit Icebreaker.com for more information.



Cool running

With winter looming, it's time to start thinking about some fancy new cold-weather gear to get yourself up and running. The sexy, lightweight Animagi Hybrid Jacket by The North Face will fulfill all of your specky, techy desires (except allowing you to morph into an animal at will, as its namesake in Harry Potter does, which is a shame). Featuring 'Primaloft Eco insulation', 'body-mapped thermal protection', reflective logos and thumb loops to keep those sleeves in place when you're on the move, it's got most things covered. Designed specifically for 'extended high-aerobic activity in cold, dry weather', the Animagi is not going to protect you in a downpour, nor will it keep your arms warm in seriously cold weather if you're strolling along at a leisurely pace. However, the jacket's insulated body and stretchy, breathable sidepanels make for superior insulation at the core and an extended range of motion – ideal for cold weather running. Male and female versions retail for \$199.95. Contact The North Face on (02) 8306 3311 for more information or see www.thenorthface.com.

Pocket full of goodness

While you might normally associate Wenger with the classic Swiss Army Knife, from now on, we're going to associate it with pockets, because its new Zernez alpine ascent pack has a lot of them. Seriously, if you're a sucker for secret hiding places, this one will keep you entertained for hours. Along with all the standards, it has a special 'media pocket', a map case and mesh pocket, a 'first-aid organiser pocket', a 'quick-stash sleeve' and, of course, a specialised pocket for your Swiss Army knife. But don't worry, you'll know which one it is – it has a little diagram on the side. (Ah, the Swiss, they're so organised.) It's also fully adjustable and features an 'ergonomically enhanced waist belt system', to make it comfy to walk in. There are rubberised gear loops, sleeping bag attachment points, trekking pole mounting points and an ice axe loop, among other things. Weighing in at 2.6 kilograms, it's not the lightest in its class, but with so many quality bells and whistles, what would you expect? The pack comes in 50- and 60-litre sizes and retails at \$595/\$650. Check out www.wenger.net.au for more information.



A hot little number

If you have trouble keeping a handle on your matches and lighters, or you'd like to put the world's smallest stove (with igniter) on your equipment list, look out for the catchily-named OD-1BS. Soto tell us their newest creation is 'tailor made' for backpackers, campers and high-altitude mountaineers, with a decent 11 000-BTU output to get that water bubbling. The stove incorporates a piezo igniter, so there's no need to remember matches (although this technology can fail at higher altitudes). It's extremely small, weighing just 160 grams and measuring 3.4 x 4.62 x 6.37 centimetres when packed, spreading out to 15 x 15 x 8 centimetres when in use. Best of all, it's environmentally friendly, with a burning time of about 1.5 hours for a 250 gram gas canister. This little number won't burn a hole in your pocket, retailing at \$99.95. www.outdoorsurvival.com.au.



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FROM THE BILLY

The Wilderness Chef, John Pillans, brings us another high-quality and original recipe

Pushing the limits of energy density, this meal is delicious enough to cook at home as often as when you're out and about. With the optional chilli offering some extra heat, this tasty treat sits happily in any season and caters to a range of tastes.

Sneaky Satay

Feeds: three for dinner

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Energy Density: 14.5 kJ/g 12.7 kJ/ml

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups of rice
- coconut cream powder to make 400 ml
- 200 g peanut butter
- handful of green beans (150 g)
- 20 ml soy sauce
- 750 ml water
- chilli powder (optional)

Method

Heat the water and rice in a two-litre pot until boiling, and then stir though the coconut cream powder and leave to simmer with the lid on. Top and tail the beans then snap into fork-friendly lengths, stirring them through the pot five minutes into the simmering. Continue to simmer for a further ten minutes, stirring occasionally, then remove from the heat and let stand for ten minutes with the lid left on. Finally, stir through the peanut butter and add the soy sauce and chilli to taste.

The beans add a much-needed bite to the meal and, bought fresh, will happily last many days in a pack when wrapped loosely in the typical plastic fruit and veg bag. With its longevity and lightweight nature, this is an ideal meal for a long trip, and it makes efficient use of water. While the cooking takes some time there is very little to do, so it's suitably social for any lazy evening.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section. Send them to editorial@wild.com.au.



Seventh Journey

BY EARL DE BLONVILLE
(BEAR BOOKS, 2009, RRP \$35,
www.bearclan.biz)

In 1986 Earl de Blonville led a disparate crew of young adventurers to the frozen East Greenland coast. Their mission was to recreate and film arctic explorer Gino Watkins' seventh, and fatal, journey by kayak in 1932. This is a disarmingly frank account of the personalities that battle, not only the extreme landscape, but each other, as they overcome wild storms, mechanical failure and near deadly dunkings as the winter freeze

descends. The writing soars when the author describes scenes of beauty including the northern lights and the iceberg ridden coastline that the expedition must battle through. There are moments of high drama, such as when the team is split during a violent *pitaraq* (arctic winds which reach speeds of up to 150 knots), and moments of bizarre group dynamics, such as when the leader is physically assaulted by another team member. A fascinating insight into ambition, courage and perseverance against the odds.
Andrew Hughes



The Ever Varying Flood

BY PETER GRIFFITH AND BRUCE BAXTER
(PROWLING TIGER PRESS, 2010, RRP \$34.95,
www.paddlesports.com.au)

The Ever Varying Flood: a history and guide to the Franklin River is a great companion on a trip down the Franklin and Gordon rivers. The second edition has been a while coming, but it has been considerably rewritten and gives lots of up to date information. Though brief, it includes notes on the natural history, convict era, explorers, loggers and early descents,

which make interesting reading for anyone conversant with the river or making a descent. The book also has a strong focus on the wilderness aspect of the area and there is a short section on the historic blockade that anyone who was involved will enjoy reading. Practically, the maps and breakdown of paddling the river are concise and accurate, though some people may wish to copy them and place them in a waterproof sleeve for easy access on the river.
John Wilde



Gagged

BY GREG OGLE (ENVIROBOOK, 2009, RRP
\$21.95, www.wilderness.org.au)

A storm was unleashed in 2004 when Gunns Ltd, a giant forestry corporation, sued The Wilderness Society (TWS), Bob Brown and 18 others for \$6 million for various environmental protest activities. Facing financial ruin, the defendants scrambled to fight the case. After more than five years it finally ended with Gunns dropping its claims and agreeing to pay significant legal costs. But along the way, what was the human and social cost? What was the fallout for

free speech? *Gagged: the Gunns 20 and other law suits* is the inside story of the Gunns case and similar animal rights and development protest cases (known as SLAPP suits). The book will appeal to those interested in free speech, protest rights or just the inside workings of a David and Goliath legal battle. The author, who had a close connection with each case, is not a lawyer (he calls himself a bush lawyer) and the writing is easy to access, frank and personal. Ogle passionately describes the impact of SLAPP suits and argues for reform to stop their future use.
Hugh de Kretser

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I was born in the Blue Mountains and grew up surrounded by wilderness. It was endlessly fascinating for me: exploring, looking at wildlife, watching flowers as they came and went. As I grew up we moved around a bit, living in various places in the mountains, and I never stopped exploring.

While studying medicine at Sydney Uni, I made a beeline to my uncle and aunt's property at Glen Innes as often as I could to continue my exploration of the bush. After uni I worked for two years in Canberra Hospital with short stints in Alice and Darwin.

During a year in the UK, I did a walk from Glasgow to Inverness, sleeping rough in abandoned crofts and under rock overhangs. It took many weeks, and the experience was a real breakthrough for me.

I worked my way back to Australia as a ship's doctor and stayed on the boats for a short while until I saw a job advertised in Tasmania. I'd always wanted to go there to look for the Tasmanian tiger and I had just seen a program on the flooding of Lake Pedder. I arrived in April 1972 and after a weekend I sent a postcard to my parents saying: 'I am home. From Bob.'

Immediately I ran into the Lake Pedder campaigners, who had recently formed the world's first Greens party (the United Tasmanian Group). They had a caravan in the centre of Launceston. I'd found people that thought along the same lines as me. Although I had come to Tasmania to look for the Tassie tiger – which we searched for in vain – I was fascinated by the Lake Pedder situation and became heavily involved with it. After losing that battle I was drawn towards politics. I was asked to stand for the UTG in 1974 and got into the Franklin Campaign shortly afterwards.

My affinity with nature stems from nature itself. There's a reason we put pictures of nature on our walls to decorate our lives, not images of bulldozers and chainsaws. We decorate with nature and we relax with nature – it's part of our genetic make-up. But big cities, fast living, consumption – all these things tend to repress our natural instincts. My love of nature and the world around us is just a little less repressed than others.

My partner Paul and I have just finished building a little house surrounded by nature – swift parrots, tiger snakes, black cockatoos, dolphins. We still get away for a big walk at least once a year. I get up to Liffey as often as I can. It's at the base of Drys Bluff, which I must have walked about 60 or 70 times. My walking is governed by where the wild flowers are and I carry my camera with me always.

Politics keeps me out of the bush more than I would like but it is important for me to protect what we have left. We are dependent on nature, not vice versa. I work seven days a week with the Greens because there is no transformation to be had with the big political parties. We need to place ecology and the environment in the centre of human self-interest.

I am happier than I have ever been in my life. I have a self-confidence that I never had years ago, I've got a terrific partner and I'm working with people who are a delight. The feedback we get is amazing. I used to be followed around by people wanting to hurt me; I have had unpeeped letterboxes destroyed up at Liffey and shots fired at me. Now that has all gone. It's a great privilege to be in the position I am in, to help influence the future outcome for our environment.

Interview and photo Craig Ingram





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